

THROUGH THE EYES OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATORS:  
WHAT MATTERS IN SELECTING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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by Thomas M. Muhlenbruck  
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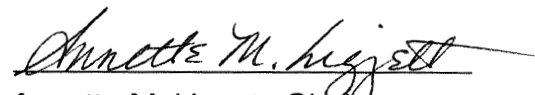
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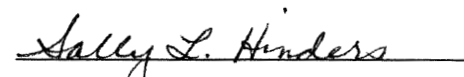
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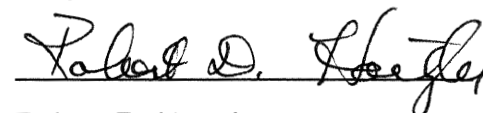
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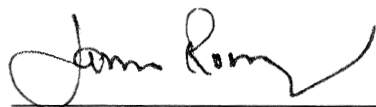
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# THROUGH THE EYES OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATORS: WHAT MATTERS IN THE SELECTION OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS

An abstract of a Dissertation by  
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February 2001  
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The problem. The problem of this study is two-fold: first to describe those characteristics that are most likely to appeal to educators when hiring elementary principals in large sized school districts in Iowa. Second, to describe what a typical hiring process looks like in these districts and whether or not that process has changed over time.

Procedures. Data were collected through two sources: A survey of 58 members of the Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators (IASPA) and twelve follow up in-depth interviews with selected members of this group.

Findings. The following research questions guide this study: Are there characteristics that are clearly more influential than others in the selection of elementary principals? How does the hiring process typically proceed? Is it different from the past? If it is different, how and why? Four major themes emerged from the survey (76% return rate) and interviews. These included: (a) value and respect for others, (b) knowledge of how schools work, (c) licensure requirements and experience, and (d) organizational fit. Developing specific hiring criteria was found to be the most important hiring item in the hiring process. In addition, participants in this study spoke of increased participation and collaboration among people within the district as well as across the state throughout the entire recruitment and selection process.

Conclusions. Three broad conclusions emerged from the findings of this study: First, a candidate who is hired as an elementary principal in a large district in Iowa must be a "people" person – someone who first and foremost values and respects others. Second, a candidate who is hired as an elementary principal must have a strong working knowledge of both instruction and management. Finally, data from this study indicated that formal and informal hiring networks are alive and well in Iowa.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

A number of today's elementary school students live in dysfunction at home. These students need to know that they can count on school being a structured, safe, and caring environment that will provide the support they need to learn and grow into responsible young adults. Schools can and should be safe havens for children where the adults in their lives serve as positive role models and paragons of excellent teaching and learning. In a recent speech (1999), U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley stressed the importance of taking a close look at our current educational challenges in order to offer all of our children – rich and poor alike – a quality education. Quite simply, the educational experiences offered to children in today's elementary schools set the stage for the rest of their lives (Kagan, 1999).

Since the publication of A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence, 1983) there has been a flood of research highlighting, among other things, the importance of a school principal in setting the environment for quality learning. For many people, no single person seems to have the influence with staff, families, and their children than does the person who serves as an

elementary principal (Bookbinder, 1992). At the very least, no one disputes the enormous influence that a school principal has on ensuring the effectiveness, productivity, and success of a school (Anderson, 1988; Baron, 1990; Bookbinder, 1992; Jones, 1995; Silins, 1994). If a school is unfortunate enough to have an uncaring principal – his or her staff will reflect that perspective. If a school principal is focused primarily on test scores, student achievement, and holding a bottom line – teachers will do just that. If a principal balances academics, accountability, and compassion – both adults and students in that building will do the same. It is the principal who sets the tone, the culture, and the atmosphere for learning. He or she is the mirror upon which others see their reflection. To put it plainly, the right principal in a school is one of the best teaching models on the staff: the wrong one is the worst.

The logic of this study follows research showing that elementary education has life-long influence on a child's future well-being and success (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Schweiker-Marra, 1995) and what goes on in a school depends significantly on the talents and attitudes of the school principal (Harchar & Hyle, 1996; Young & Schmidt, 1998). It stands to reason that if the elementary school experience is critical to one's future, and the principal has considerable influence

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on the workings of the school, then the person who serves as the building leader has significant influence on that experience. Thus, the person who is hired to serve as an elementary school principal is one of the most important hiring decisions that a school district makes.

Presently, there is talk of a leadership crisis looming across the nation with a growing trend toward school administrators retiring from their jobs in the next several years with fewer and fewer people applying to take their place. As this trend comes to fruition, it may now be even more critical than in the past as to who will hold these elementary school principal positions. The research is clear: choosing an excellent principal enhances a school district's probability for success while a poor selection may haunt the district for many years after that person has left (Anderson, 1988; Baron, 1990; Bookbinder, 1992; Braun, Willems, Brown, & Green, 1987; Webster, 1988; Young & McMurry, 1986; Young & Schmidt, 1998).

One person who holds considerable influence regarding this hiring process and the selection of a new principal is the district's school personnel or human resource administrator. The person who holds that job is responsible for setting up and implementing the hiring for that district. The focus of this study is



to contribute toward a better understanding of what school personnel administrators consider important when hiring an elementary school principal, to describe how this process typically occurs, and whether or not it has changed significantly from past practice.

### Iowa Context

Specifically, this study focuses on the hiring of elementary school principals in Iowa where a recent survey was conducted by the Iowa Department of Education and the School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) of all Iowa school administrators who were 50 years of age and older. The purpose of this survey was to determine the retirement intentions of this group. Of the 1,880 administrators surveyed in the 1998-99 school year, 674 or 35.9% of them are eligible to retire by the year 2003 with most indicating they intend to do so (School Administrators of Iowa, 1999). Once these administrators leave their employment, it will dramatically increase the number of elementary principal positions available throughout the state. In addition, professional advancement of current elementary principals will cause even more vacancies, especially at the beginning or entry level. According to Ted Stilwell, Director of the Iowa

Department of Education, "All of us in Iowa should be concerned about this leadership shortage because it will result in a leadership drought in hundreds of Iowa schools, affecting thousands of Iowa school children" (Iowa Department of Education, 1999, p. 1).

Considering this upcoming administrative shortage, school personnel administrators in Iowa are turning their attention toward attracting excellent school leaders for their school and community. Currently, there are thirty-two large sized urban and suburban school districts in the state that employ a human resource director who is a member of the Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators (IASPA). The IASPA is an organization of approximately sixty members from across the state who represent school personnel administrators and other educators interested in the roles and responsibilities of human resource directors for Iowa's elementary and secondary schools. The school personnel administrators from this organization are considered by most in the state as leaders in their field because of their elite knowledge and experience regarding the recruiting and hiring of school administrators in the state of Iowa. Utilizing an elite group (Marshall & Rossman, 1989) for this study allowed the

researcher to gain current, insightful perspectives of the issues surrounding the hiring of new elementary school principals in Iowa.

### Purpose/Importance of the Study

Throughout the country, and in the state of Iowa, a number of school principals are ending their professional careers and a new generation of leaders will be assuming their role as the elementary school principal. Who these people are and the influence they will have on the lives of Iowa school children and their families will be enormous. The purpose of this study was to contribute a better understanding of what school personnel administrators of large Iowa school districts consider as important factors in hiring an elementary school principal. It is in this sense that the study was intended to be of interest to people who hire elementary school principals and people who seek those positions. Also, this study provides information to universities and professional organizations that have school leadership preparation programs and state departments of education that license and credential school administrators.

## Problem Statement and Research Questions

The problem of this study is two-fold: first to describe those characteristics that are most likely to appeal to educators when hiring elementary school principals in large sized school districts in Iowa. Second, to describe what a typical hiring process looks like in these districts and whether or not that process has changed over time.

Specifically, the following two research questions guide this study:

1. Are there characteristics that are clearly more influential than others in the selection of elementary principal candidates?
2. How does the hiring process typically proceed? Is it different from the past? If it is different, how and why?

## Methodology

The research design, data collection, and data analysis for this study are based on descriptive qualitative methodology (Creswell, 1998). This study focuses on knowledge and insights provided by members of the Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators (IASPA). Many of the approximately 60

members of the IASPA are school personnel administrators from large school districts in the state. Specifically, the researcher used an iterative (Miles & Huberman, 1994) process of data collection and analysis throughout the study. The primary sources of data used in this study included a 29 item survey sent to 58 members of the IASPA and 12 in-depth interviews conducted with selected members of that organization. Key themes from four pilot in-depth interviews, a review of literature, the current Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders (ISLLC) (1996), and seven draft reviews were used in designing the survey. Data from the survey instrument were then used to develop the protocol for 12 in-depth interviews with selected IASPA members. These interviews were used to confirm and expand the understandings of the survey. Data analysis included rank ordering the survey response choices to establish a range of mean scores, and specific codes and themes were analyzed from verbatim transcriptions of the 12 in-depth interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

## Limitations of the Study

The study had the following limitations:

1. The intent of this study is to understand those factors that influence selected school personnel administrators in Iowa when hiring an elementary school principal. The descriptive findings of this qualitative study reflect those perceptions expressed by selected school personnel administrators from primarily large urban and suburban school districts in the state. The findings reported cannot be generalized to a broader population of school districts.

2. The researcher clarified and revised the response choices on the final survey instrument by utilizing the feedback of the pilot survey respondents.

However, the validity of the final survey data is limited to the respondents' interpretation of the survey questions and represented the perceptions of the respondents only at the time of data collection.

## Organization of the Study

The second chapter of this study reviews the literature focusing on issues regarding the hiring of elementary school principals. The third chapter presents details of methodology. In the fourth chapter, the findings of the study are presented. The fifth and final chapter provides a summary discussion of the findings and draws conclusions of the study. In addition, implications are offered and recommendations are suggested for future research.

## Definition of Terms

AASPA: American Association of School Personnel Administrators was founded in 1938 and is the premiere organization in North America that represents school personnel and human resources staff.

IASPA: Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators is the state organization affiliated with the American Association of School Personnel Administrators. Members of the IASPA are school personnel administrators who are considered by many as the leaders in their field because of their extensive

knowledge and experience regarding the recruiting and hiring of school administrators in the state of Iowa.

SAI: School Administrators of Iowa is a professional organization that has served Iowa's educational leaders since 1987 and has over 2,000 members including administrators at all levels of the K-12 education system. The mission of SAI is "to be the driving force for quality education in Iowa's communities through the aggressive promotion and active development of effective administrative leadership" (School Administrators of Iowa, Annual Report, 1997).

ISLLC: Numerous national level educational organizations adopted The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders (ISLLC) on November 2, 1996. These standards are focused on establishing common standards and redefining the role of 21st century school leaders.



## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter contains a review of literature focusing on a variety of personnel selection strategies and factors that apply to the hiring of elementary school principals.

#### Personnel Selection

Recruiting and selecting capable candidates for school leadership positions may be the most important task facing many schools in the next few years (Anderson, 1991; Baltzell & Dentler, 1983b; Braun et al., 1987; Pounder & Young, 1996; Richardson et al., 1990; Sashkin & Huddle, 1988; Webster, 1988; Wendel & Breed, 1988; Young & McMurry, 1986; Young & Schmidt, 1998). Schools are in a very competitive business and must make sure, through a comprehensive hiring process, that they do not overlook the best candidates (Anderson, 1991). Young, Rinehart, and Heneman (1993) stress that the role of an organizational representative or recruiter is crucial to the recruitment process. In fact, they found that “many applicants have indicated that they chose a

particular organization because of the organizational representative that they encountered during the recruitment process” (p. 57).

Current research suggests that one of the major components of a school's success is the principal's leadership (Harchar & Hyle, 1996; Young & Schmidt, 1998). Unfortunately, the connection between effective principals and effective schools has not yet resulted in an improved selection process of administrators in many districts. Although the position of the principal is critical to the success of the school and the school district, many school districts do not have a structured and systematic process for identifying and selecting principals (Richardson et al., 1990; Wendel & Breed, 1988). According to Anderson (1991), many districts recruit and select principals in a disorganized fashion and often overlook the most capable administrative candidates.

In 1982, the National Institute of Education underwrote the first national effort to investigate the “means by which school districts actually choose school leaders” (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983a, p. 1). Upon the recognition of continuing concerns about the selection of principals, the executive summary released the following major findings:

“First, the top leadership – that is, the superintendent and his key deputies – firmly controls the process” (p. 2). However, many different factors can often constrain a superintendent in his/her level of control. Local notions of what a principal is supposed to be, supposed to look like, as well as how they are usually selected can affect a hiring decision.

“Second, the top leadership’s drive for control results from their need and responsibility to reconcile many competing goals and exigencies as they make each appointment decision” (p. 3). Often superintendents have to consider issues in addition to just the hiring of staff. These may include promoting staff, preserving seniority, satisfying faculties and parents, considering local political conditions, transferring principals who are having trouble, and meeting equity requirements. As a result, educational leadership merit is only one consideration, and it may not be the most important.

“Third, given the many competing aims involved in any appointment decision and the fact that ‘educational leadership’ is difficult to define and measure, ‘fit’ or ‘image’ often come to dominate the selection criteria” (p. 3). While there is discussion of educational leadership, transforming this into specific

criteria is not often completed. Many times, candidates compete on the basis of their “fit” to local values and beliefs.

“Fourth, women and minorities are increasing their memberships in candidate pools and among the ranks of principals. While the power of the ‘fit’ criteria works against them, the pressure for affirmative action during the past decade has had notable results” (p. 3).

“Fifth, the specific comparative consequences of various selection procedures – particularly the various technical features – are cloudy” (p. 3). Both effective and ineffective principals are selected regardless of the overall process. Also, there is substantial local variation in what a “good” or “effective” education actually is. Many times a principal is selected and does not know what the mission of the school is, which in turn undercuts their leadership role.

“Sixth, although able principals were observed and interviewed . . . the process that led to their selection could not be characterized as merit-based and equity-centered. Merit and equity standards were sometimes achieved, but special local goals, aims, and conditions very frequently determined the selection” (p. 4).

Goodlad (1983, as cited in Anderson, 1991, p. 29) found that the recruiting and hiring of principals is “to say the least casual. Most new principals are plucked out of the classroom in June and plunged into the job soon after.” Wiles and Bondi (1986) also found that most supervisors are selected because they were excellent teachers. However, Newberry (1977), Tesolowski and Morgan (1980), and Finn (1984) determined there is little evidence that a good teacher will necessarily make a good principal, and there are several differences between teaching and administrative experiences. These differences include managing the high number of tasks in various stages of completion and the lack of predictability of what a day spent as an administrator can be like. All of these authors agree that there needs to be a continuous district-wide effort to find employees with leadership potential in order to identify the most promising prospects for principal positions.

Baron’s (1990) study makes direct reference to the problem of establishing a better approach to the recruitment and screening of candidates: “The continued concern over the lack of established policies and systematic procedures for identifying and hiring the most promising principal candidates has provided the focus for many investigations” (p. 3). This study also references a

need for heterogeneous screening committees, more widely based recruiting efforts, assessment centers, and candidate pools as means of improving the ways in which candidates are screened.

According to Richardson and Prickett (1990), "the major objective of principal selection is to recognize and subsequently employ persons who are capable of successfully developing, implementing, and coordinating programs to educate children" (p. 4). According to Castetter (1981, as cited in Richardson & Prickett, 1990) there are five primary purposes a selection procedure accomplishes when selecting administrators. The first reason for a formal selection procedure is to develop a pool of candidates who meet the qualifications established by a local district. Secondly, this procedure should identify those candidates who have a strong possibility of success as a principal. Selecting personnel who are inclined to find "sufficient position satisfaction to remain in the system" (p. 6) is the third reason for a formal selection procedure. Fourth, potential candidates should be assessed on their potential for effective contributions to both school and organizational goals. Finally, selection procedures should identify candidates who are highly motivated for self-development.

The implementation of these purposes necessitates a thorough process, incorporating a series of activities to insure credibility and minimize the possibility of hiring individuals who will be poor performers (Castetter & Young, 2000).

Analysis of the literature suggests that there is agreement among writers (Anderson, 1991; Baltzell & Dentler, 1983b; Baron, 1990; Dillon, 1995; Goodlad, 1983; Hersey, 1980; Kahl, 1980; Karol, 1988; Manasse, 1983; Newberry, 1977; Richardson & Prickett, 1990; Sashkin & Huddle, 1988; Tesar, 1994; Zakariya, 1983; Van De Water, 1987) as to the major elements of the recruitment and selection of elementary principal candidates. These major elements can be presented as a model for personnel selection and are described in the following steps.

### Candidate Assessment

Sashkin and Huddle (1988) and Zakariya (1983) feel there is a better model than the typical “good-old-boy” network mentality that seems to have a grip on a number of districts. Newberry (1977) found that “expediency and whim” (p. 41) are often placed ahead of searching an area large enough to produce

applications from the finest applicants available, and they all urge administrators to evaluate the time and effort spent on selecting principals.

With the thought of principal selection being so critical, the U.S. Department of Education issued the Principal Selection Guide (1987). This document focused on and stressed the importance of a comprehensive selection process that identifies potential principal candidates before they are ready to serve. Both school board policy and administrative regulations regarding screening and selecting administrators should be adopted locally. Without an established process, many local constituent groups or individuals may find it difficult to significantly impact the decision-making (Raisch, 1993; Mertler, Steyer, & Petersen, 1997). According to Richardson and Prickett (1990), “superintendents and school boards cannot afford to alienate concerned citizens, so some selection process is imperative” (p. 8).

#### Job Description and Criteria

According to Richardson et al. (1990), a job description should be developed for each position and “should be explicit, organized, and an accurate reflection of duties and responsibilities assigned to the principal” (p. 6).



Newberry (1977) found that an “extremely small percentage of schools actually establish guidelines of job descriptions for the elementary principal” (p. 41). Until the job has been defined as to the local community’s needs and expectations, it is very difficult to establish selection criteria. He and Manasse (1983) stress that an undeveloped job description can lead to a search for a potential principal that no one has ever really defined.

In addition, federal equal employment opportunity enforcement guidelines, the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures, issued in 1978 by the Equal Opportunity Commission, indicate that a sound and comprehensive job analysis is required for the validation of selection procedures. Components and characteristics of a job analysis include, but are not limited to, the following: the job analysis must be performed on the exact job for which the selection device is to be used; it must be reduced to written form, such as a job description; the analyst must be able to describe the procedure; tasks, duties, and activities must be identified; and the amount of competency necessary for entry level must be specified (Mathis & Jackson, 1985; Thompson & Thompson, 1982).

Kahl (1980) reported that most school districts lack established policies for the selection of administrators, and that district personnel relied solely on

information gathered from interviews, academic credentials, and personal references. He also noted that there was a political aspect to the administrator selection process, and the process often operates on a “who you know, not what you know” basis.

Recognizing growing concerns about the selection of principals and the disparity in their knowledge base, Baltzell and Dentler’s study (1983b) concluded that many times principals are not selected on the basis of their merit. In many cases, the selection criteria were vague and subjective. Instead of hiring a candidate for his or her skills or merit, they found districts focused more on how a candidate would fit into the district. “Every district had a deeply held image of a ‘good’ principal or a ‘top’ candidate or ‘just what we’re looking for’” (p. 7). Baltzell and Dentler (1983, as cited in Anderson, 1988, p. 16) stated that a “lack of criterial specificity opens the way for widespread reliance on local notions of fit or image.” Consequently, this local version of “fit” can frequently prevent a realistic assessment of outside candidates, particularly women and minorities (Thomas, 1986). Research has shown that irrelevant selection criteria such as age, sex, marital status, and amount of experience continue to be used in many school districts (Wendel & Breed, 1988; Young, Rinehart, & Baits, 1997).

In her 1987 study of 576 public school superintendents in New York State, Van De Water found only one-third of the survey respondents indicated that specific selection criteria were written when a principal was hired. Without criteria, each interviewer is left to his/her own discretion in the determination of an individual being able to perform the job. In the districts that utilized an exemplary criteria approach to selection, the selection teams looked for principals who could institute effective change, not merely maintain the status quo. Both of these studies found that districts that employed exemplary selection practices gave priority to “merit” over “fit.” School officials “can increase the chances of selecting the right person for the job when they assess and match the candidates’ skills and leadership styles with the particular needs of the school” (Anderson, 1991, p. 35).

### Advertisement

Long before vacancies arise, school districts need to identify a pool of potential leaders (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983a). Such identification will help develop a pool of quality candidates from which to begin the selection process. In addition, Goodlad (1983, as cited in Anderson, 1991, p. 31) states that “school

districts would be well advised – and perhaps be required – to select, for posts available, from a pool of qualified applicants extending far beyond district lines.”

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Principal Selection Guide (1987):

Announcements should be placed in large circulation newspapers in cities within a 500-mile radius of the vacancy. If the district itself is in a large city, the search committee might advertise the opening in smaller cities.

To avoid becoming in grown, search committees should advertise in principal and superintendent newsletters, in education journals, and in the publications or at the conferences of professional associations. There are many options, but the most important thing is to avoid a narrow search that ends too soon.

### Screening

Screening is where the established job description and established criteria face their first examination. Baltzell and Dentler (1983a) stress that “those who do the screening should comprise more than a cohesive team of senior administrators, for such a closely knit group will likely lose the ability, over time,

to correct one another's errors of judgment and tend to strain to uniformity. In addition, without some other participation, screening loses its external legitimacy" (p. 13). Involving parents, teachers, principals, and even students on screening committees can help to increase the legitimacy of the screening process. Exemplary schools rely heavily on the participation of school-based as well as district-level administration and staff for screening. As a result, Fliegner (1987) stresses that a district must develop a screening scheme and standardized ranking system by which screeners can systematically judge each applicant's file against their predetermined standards.

Fliegner (1987) and Jarchow (1981) cite the importance of resume and placement folder examinations. However, they do maintain that an examination of just these items is not sufficient to ensure a fit between a principal and a school. In addition to this type of biographical data, the U. S. Department of Education's Principal Selection Guide (1987) suggests "past performance is the best single predictor of future performance" (p. 23). Therefore, reference checks and site visits can also be valuable informational tools. Regarding the significance of the reference letter, Goldstein (1986) wrote "it has become increasingly difficult for prospective employers to distinguish the qualities of one

candidate over another because, all too often, letters gush mostly praise and platitude” (p. 18). Nevertheless, letters of reference continue to be an important element considered during the screening process. The U. S. Department of Education’s Principal Selection Guide (1987) makes the suggestion to “phone references even after they have written a recommendation because they may reveal things in conversation that they would be reluctant to put in writing” (p. 23).

In his study, Baron (1990) randomly surveyed 80 superintendents from across the United States to determine the importance that they assigned to a variety of selected principal recruitment and selection practices. He found that superintendents perceived preparation of an accurate job description, development of specific recruitment procedures, and recruiting on a statewide basis the most important recruitment and screening practices. These superintendents indicated that professional references were the most important criterion from which to select principal candidates. Marital status and gender were given the least amount of importance. An interesting finding in the Baron study was the low rating given to recruiting nationally and forming a pool of potential candidates. These are practices that have been highly recommended

to recruit and select potential candidates (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983b; Goodlad, 1983).

In a similar study conducted by Tesar (1994) with Ohio school superintendents, she also found that personal references were one of the most important factors identified by the respondents in their selection of elementary principal candidates.

### Assessment Centers

“A promising option for screening potential principal candidates is the assessment center” (Anderson, 1991, p. 39). The creation of the Assessment Center Project of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is an effort to improve the process of selecting principals. In a typical center, “individuals who are certified to become school principals are evaluated by highly trained assessors” (Cornet, 1983, p. 7). Participants take part in a number of different activities designed to duplicate behaviors that would happen on the job. Each participant is evaluated on 12 behavioral dimensions including: problem analysis, judgment, decisiveness, organizational ability, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, communication, personal motivation, range of

interest, and educational values (Cornet, 1983; Hersey, 1980). These attributes can be identified in individuals participating in an assessment center. The result of this activity is a 12-dimensional profile for each of the candidates, which can be utilized as an additional screening device for candidates.

The assessment center model has wide use in the selection of middle managers in private industry and, according to Baltzell and Dentler (1983b), “most studies support them as an effective method of managerial selection” (p. 21). However, Hersey (1980) found evidence that strongly rejects the interchangeability of personal characteristics as measured by a structured interview and professional skills as measured by an assessment center. Evidence in his study strongly rejected the interchangeability of the two procedures and encouraged school district officials to adopt selection criteria and procedures that have established validity for their local goals.

The cost of assessment centers causes many districts not to participate. According to Dentler (1983, as cited in Anderson, 1988, p. 18), “they are fairly expensive and cumbersome to put in place. People are looking for shortcuts, and there just aren’t any. When you spend time and effort on selecting good



principals, you get both short-term and long-term payoffs-not just good leaders, but good system operations" (p. 18).

### The Administrator Perceiver

An approach that builds on traditional selection processes is a structured interview that allows school leaders to judge a "candidate's responses in light of what research says outstanding principals would answer to the same questions" (Zakariya, 1983, p. 22). One such interview, The Administrator Perceiver, was developed by the Lincoln, Nebraska, consulting firm Selection Research Incorporated (SRI).

The stated goal of SRI (1993) is to choose the best candidate, in terms of both personal and professional qualifications. SRI uses its Perceiver Academies "to train professionals responsible for the selection and development of others to become more skillful in reaching their human development objectives"(p. 2).

In the Administrator Perceiver process, the trainees are provided with: (a) a systematic frame of reference to perceive, select, and develop administrative talent; (b) a means of identifying administrators by perceiving them in the twelve life themes that research done by SRI claims to have found existing in

outstanding administrators; and, (c) a process which makes use of a highly structured, and stress-free interview that is founded on more than 20 years of observing outstanding managers in education.

Twelve administrator life themes (Gallup Corporation, 1976) are said by SRI to be found in effective educational managers. These include: Commitment (the candidate's ability to completely dedicate to a mission), Ego Drive (the candidate's ability to define himself/herself as a significant person, Achiever (the candidate's ability to make things happen and get things done), Developer (the candidate's ability to facilitate growth), Individualized Perception (the candidate's ability to attune to individual differences of teachers), Relator (the candidate's ability to build strong relationships), Stimulator (the candidate's ability to create a positive teaching environment), Team (the candidate's ability to work with others), Arranger (the candidate's ability to set things up and make them work), Command (the candidate's ability to be in charge and make things happen), Discipline (the candidate's ability to structure their lives and bring structure to others), and Concept (the candidate's ability to share ideas with which they explain how they manage their school). The seventy-question interview moves

from theme to theme, making it difficult for a candidate to second-guess what the interviewer is looking for in an administrator (Zakariya, 1983).

As with the utilization of an assessment center screening, "caution should be used in allowing any single selection procedure or information source to dominate the selection decision" (Wendell & Breed, 1988, p. 38). According to SRI's Hess Dyas (as cited in Zakariya, 1983, p. 22), the school system should still "use resumes, transcripts, recommendations, and the like, but the structured interview adds depth and predictability."

### Internships

Baltzell and Dentler (1983a) and Anderson (1988) discussed the use of elementary principal internships in exemplary school districts that utilize quality recruiting and selection processes.

The Hayward school district in suburban Oakland, California utilizes the Administrative Intern Program (AIP). Teachers must meet stringent eligibility criteria in order to apply to enter the AIP program. Applicants complete a simulated problem exercise, and those who are selected by senior administrators begin a three year period of formal training and an on the job internship. "The

AIP content is strongly oriented toward administrative leadership development, but those selected for internships are already established masters of curriculum and instructional design work” (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983a, p. 8). The major achievement of AIP has been the establishment of a large pool of skilled educational leaders.

According to Baltzell and Dentler (1983a), before an internship candidate is selected as a principal candidate in the Montgomery County Public School System in Maryland, they take a 10-week, after-work course on leadership. They can then choose to take a second 18-week, three-credit course in administrative leadership. Senior administrators review the performance of all of these internship applicants, and those who qualify are invited to administrative competency seminars where their skills are formally assessed by a panel of senior administrators. The top candidates in this process are then given the opportunity to take part in an internship. Before an intern can be selected as a principal, he/she takes part in a stringent assessment conducted much like an assessment center. Over 200 competencies are rated, and “only the best internship candidates become regular principals upon the decision of the superintendent” (p. 9).

Anderson (1988) discussed the STAR "Selecting and Training Administrative Recruits" program at the David Douglas School District in Oregon. Of the three phases of the STAR program, the first involves a series of ten-week classes about educational administration, which are specific to the David Douglas School System and are led by David Douglas administrators. The second phase of the STAR program includes a week long practicum experience based on a plan that each intern designs in phase one of the program, and "mentor relationships are established between participants and administrators" (p. 17). In the final phase, the district creates and establishes formal internships for the identified and interested candidates with building principals. The district also offers a series of workshops that further explore topics of educational leadership. According to Barbara Rommel (as cited in Anderson, 1988, p. 18) "STAR has the potential of creating a pool of 'shining' candidates for future administrative openings, willing to carry on the tradition of excellence in David Douglas schools or in other districts."

### Simulations

Anderson (1988) reported on the exemplary simulation exercises that are used in the selection process at Tigard Public School District in Oregon. Each candidate completes a fifty-minute written simulation through which the screening team can assess the writing ability and philosophy of the candidate. Candidates are also asked to view a twenty-minute classroom lesson. After viewing the lesson, the candidate prepares an observation report and conducts a conference with the teacher who taught the lesson. Candidates are rated on their conferencing and observational skills. The clinical approach that Tigard utilizes is just what national reports (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983b; U. S. Department of Education; 1987) say needs to be the norm in the selection process.

### Interview Conditions

The interview is the most widely used selection technique and the technique that is often the most influential in hiring decisions (Castetter & Young, 2000). The purpose of the interview is to obtain certain insights and information about applicants that cannot be obtained using other methods (Castetter & Young, 2000) and to allow the interviewer an opportunity to assess directly the

candidate's quality, potential, personality, and values (Vornberg & Liles, 1983).

Oral interviews can be of two general types: the structured and the unstructured (Castetter & Young, 2000). In the structured interview, the same, exact, predetermined, and well-thought-out questions are asked of each applicant allowing for comparison of answers. In the unstructured interview, candidates are allowed to express opinions, beliefs, and attitudes about topics introduced by the interviewers or the candidate. This process can actually allow candidates to control the flow of the interview process (Anderson, 1988).

For Carlson, Schwab, and Heneman (1970, as cited in Van De Water, 1987, p. 35) a highly structured interview "has the greatest potential for a valid selection." This format can generate information that will allow interviewers to agree with each other and coincides with the findings of Dipboye (1992). Baltzell and Dentler (1983a) stress that when candidates are asked the same questions under structured conditions, the interviewers know what to ask and what to do with the information they receive.

Yate (1988) confirmed these suggestions and also suggested that interviews have advanced preparation, relevant questions, and active listeners. He further stated that interviewers should receive intensive training and establish

rapport early in the interview to avoid undue stress. The interviewer must be able to get the applicant to talk; however, he maintained that the interview should be only one component of the screening procedures.

Researchers agree that principal interviews should be conducted by an interview committee rather than by one administrator (Richardson & Prickett, 1990; Engle & Erion, 1984). According to Baltzell and Dentler (1983b), broad representation of teachers and parents, as well as administrators and supervisors on screening groups, enables greater legitimacy of the selection process, as the "reasonableness, fairness, and integrity of the process can be witnessed by relevant affected parties" (p. 60). Engle and Erion (1984) reviewed hiring practices used in administration and identified effective practices. Establishing predetermined criteria and qualifications were found to be critical to the use of time and resources. In addition, interview guides should be carefully developed and followed.

Greenlaw and Kohl (1980) found that combining highly skilled interviewers with structured interview procedures results in greater reliability and validity. This coincides with Pounder and Young who found (1996, as cited in Winter, McCabe, and Newton, 1998, p. 274), "when the individuals charged with making selection



decisions have received systematic training in the technicalities and the limitations of existing selection practices, the resulting selection decisions tend to be more valid in terms of selecting individuals who perform well on the job.”

Milhon-Cress (1990) utilized a survey with 292 Indiana public school corporation superintendents. The purpose of this study was to investigate the selection process utilized by Indiana schools in the employment of elementary school principals, to determine whether there were significant differences in these procedures, and whether some of these differences could be attributed to the school corporation's classification. The respondents in this study were placed in classifications of urban, metropolitan, suburban, town, and rural corporations.

A difference in the involvement of groups of people in the interview and hiring processes was indicated in this study. In those classifications where differences occurred, “the tendency was to involve community members, parents, teachers, and principals in the interviewing process but not in the hiring process. This study found that a role in the candidate screening process does not necessarily indicate a role in the decision making process to hire an elementary school principal” (p. 75).

### Factors that Influence Hiring Decisions

Van De Water (1987) conducted a study of 576 public school superintendents in New York State and identified four sub scales of selection criteria as most important in the interviews conducted for the selection of each candidate considered seriously for a principalship.

Van De Water found that being an instructional leader and the ability “to demonstrate a commitment to academic goals and a knowledge of curriculum, but also to frame specific curricular goals and objectives” (p. 101) to be the most important factor revealed by the respondents. Her findings indicated that the principal should emphasize student achievement as the primary outcome of schooling, as well as monitor and evaluate student progress.

Human relation skills were the second most important area in the eyes of the respondents. Van De Water found that effective principals need to feel comfortable working with people who “represent diverse constituencies” (p. 102), including school and district staff, students, and parents. Listening, being open and honest, warm and caring, sociable and out-going, and flexible were also valuable skills found in the data.

Management and knowledge of school finance, legal issues, special education procedures, and gifted and talented programs were the third most important factors. The fourth sub scale, background, did not receive a high response rate. Issues such as the candidates' race, ethnicity, sex, and marital status were areas that the researcher felt influenced the respondents to assign a low rating to this sub scale.

Tesar (1994) studied the criteria employed in the selection of beginning elementary school principals in Ohio during the 1992-93 school year. The data in this study focused on selection factors based on academic criteria, personal characteristics, and professional competencies.

In this study, the characteristics that superintendents or their designee agreed were the most important in an elementary principal candidate were "attitude toward others, evidence of strong human relationship skills, and demonstration of decision making skills" (p. 67). The overall category of personal characteristics demonstrated the highest degree of correlation on the Spearman Rank Order Correlation of Coefficients.

Tesar also identified factors related to candidate rejection. In this area, "enthusiasm, emotional adjustment, and overall credentials" (p. 68) were

considered to be the most important. Factors that were noted to be least likely to cause rejection of a candidate included gender, the residency of the candidate, and his or her marital status.

In his study, Newberry (1977) wanted to find the irrelevant factors that should not be considered as valid measures of predicting administrative effectiveness. He worked with a panel of ten practicing superintendents from a variety of different school settings and sizes in British Columbia, Canada, in this study.

The first factor that Newberry found irrelevant in his study was the overemphasis of the formal undergraduate and graduate education courses. Other irrelevant factors that he found included: previous teaching experience, sex of the candidate, length of previous administrative experience, age of the candidate, and marital status. Newberry concluded that these six factors should have no validity when considering applications for principal positions.

Newberry's study found the following personal criteria as significant to administrator selection: intelligence, group skills, scholarship, mature judgment, good health, and personal security. He found the professional criteria that should be considered to be: human relations skills, communication skills, community

relations skills, administrative-technical skills, decision-making skills, research skills, curriculum development skills, and change strategy skills.

Dillon (1995) surveyed 296 superintendents in the state of Indiana in 1995. In this study, Dillon found the selection criteria superintendents considered the most important were those that “involved interpersonal skills such as the ability to effectively listen and communicate, the ability to work with a wide variety of people, and the ability to marshall others’ efforts toward reaching the goals of the school” (p. 153). The selection criteria considered the least important included gender, marital status, and familiarity of the candidate with the employing school system.

Karol (1988) studied 110 elementary and unified school superintendents in Arizona from districts having 500 or more students. Positive and important factors on the resume’ of selected candidates were knowledge of curriculum, program development, professional experience, and professional memberships. Having strong assessment center ratings in judgment, organizational ability, and leadership were also found to be important in obtaining an interview. The most important negative factor influencing superintendents in this area was a candidate’s lack of curriculum experience.

The respondents valued professional qualities such as knowledge of curriculum, awareness of teaching and learning strategies, leadership, and education. Strong interpersonal skills and sensitivity to others were also found to be important.

Data indicated that superintendents did not place an inordinate value on gender, years of experience, or personal profiles. Characteristics rated negatively by superintendents were applicants who appeared weak in the areas of curriculum, leadership, and effective interpersonal skills.

The findings of this study indicated that the evaluation of prospective candidates centered on professional qualities rather than personal characteristics. Survey results indicated that the selection criteria used by the superintendents required the candidates to compete on the basis of professional qualifications rather than “fit” to the local school district norms or values. Rarely in this study was “language found that could be interpreted to mean a superintendent was primarily interested in finding a candidate whose image fit local norms and values or whose fit is expressed through social behavior and physical appearance.” (p. 140).

Like Baron (1990), Dillon (1995), Tesar (1994), Newberry (1977), and Van De Water (1987), Karol's (1988) study indicated particular emphasis on human relation skills and instructional leadership. The respondents' emphasis on the instructional leadership dimension in each of these studies is consistent with the leadership behaviors associated with administrators in effective schools (Anderson, 1988; Baron, 1990; Bookbinder, 1992; Jones, 1995).

All of the authors noted age, gender, and marital status as irrelevant factors in the selection process. This does indicate compliance in hiring practices as recommended by the Equal Employment Opportunities and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

### Summary

Many school districts in the state of Iowa will soon be faced with the task of hiring an elementary school principal to lead their district, and current research suggests staff selection is critical to the success of an educational organization. The literature identifies a wide range of competencies important to both those aspiring to become an elementary principal and to those who are responsible for their selection.

Literature on the perspectives of acting superintendents in terms of their opinions about the most critical competencies for principal candidates revealed that instructional leadership and human relation skills are critical for potential elementary principals.

School districts cannot overlook the importance of a credible and comprehensive recruitment, screening, and selection process that identifies quality elementary principal candidates. A selection process based on a clear view of the principal's role and effective candidate evaluation procedures is essential and cannot be left to chance.

The stakeholders in each local district need to be a part of the development and execution of the recruitment and hiring process. Likewise, principal vacancies must be well publicized and should be done at the national, state, and local level. The candidates' skills must also be assessed using the selection methods best suited to reveal the information that the individual district needs in order to make the hiring decision. Quite simply, the elementary principal hiring process is a complex multi-faceted process.



## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

The research design, data collection, and data analysis for this study was based on descriptive qualitative methodology (Creswell, 1998). This study focused on the Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators (IASPA). Many of the approximately sixty members of the IASPA are school personnel administrators from larger school districts in the state. Specifically, this study used an iterative (Miles & Huberman, 1994) process throughout the following four stages of research: (a) developing a survey instrument, (b) conducting a survey with members of the Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators, (c) interviewing selected survey respondents, and (d) data analysis.

#### Developing the Survey

The development of the survey used in this study began with a broad-based literature review that focused on issues regarding the hiring of elementary school principals. Along with the review of related literature, the researcher held

conversational interviews with a number of Iowa school administrators in order to acquire their informed perspectives regarding issues that are specific to hiring school principals in the state of Iowa. Also, the researcher examined a number of survey instruments that have been used in previous studies of this nature.

### Review of Literature

The review of literature included an extensive review of journal articles in the areas of elementary school hiring practices, effective schools, and school leadership using the ERIC system as an initial guide. An examination of selected human resource administration textbooks, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders, and a search of related dissertations through Dissertation Abstracts was also conducted. This review of related literature revealed the importance of establishing a comprehensive elementary school principal hiring process and the critical characteristics that have been found in effective elementary school principals in previous studies.

### Conversational Interviews

Four informal interviews were conducted from December 1999 through February 2000. All interviews were tape-recorded with verbatim transcriptions done by the researcher. Interviewees included two retired school superintendents, one of whom was also directing a state wide leadership initiative; a staff member of the state administrators' organization; and an acting superintendent. As suggested by several authors (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994), constructive feedback was obtained from these interviewees concerning the questions being asked and the clarity of terms. The suggestions provided by these interviewees were used in the subsequent development of the survey and interview protocol and added to the validity of the final questions asked of the respondents in the study.

### Pilot Surveys

A survey was selected as a primary data source of this study because it was a good method of collecting information from people about their ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. It also provided numerical data that served as part of the organizational framework for the subsequent in-depth interviews

(Fink & Kosecoff, 1998; Thomas, 1999), and as Borg and Gall (1989) indicate, survey research is appropriate for investigating a wide range of educational situations and accounts for a substantial portion of educational research.

As suggested by Dillman (1978), pretests of the survey instrument were conducted for the purpose of identifying possible problems in its construction and content. For this study, the final survey that was used went through seven drafts over a four-month period. All of these revisions were necessary and added strength, reliability, and validity to the final survey instrument (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996). In all, thirty school administrators who were not part of the final study were respondents for these pilot surveys.

The first pilot survey contained 51 items and was distributed to 10 school administrators who were not members of the Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators, but were in a position in which they were responsible for hiring elementary principals. After receiving constructive feedback from these respondents, the second draft was developed and contained revisions made to the initial pilot survey. It was distributed to 10 school administrators including some of the initial survey respondents. Feedback from this process led to a third survey draft that included 51 forced choice and open-ended questions. After

examining the respondent input from the third survey with my dissertation advisor in mid February 2000, a fourth draft of the survey was constructed. The fourth draft was then distributed to five school administrators.

Using constructive feedback from these administrators and my dissertation advisor, a fifth survey containing 30 forced choice items and a checklist was distributed to five administrators. Feedback from these survey respondents led to the development of the sixth draft of the survey that was distributed to five school administrators in early March 2000. This survey contained 15 forced choice items indicating the importance of certain characteristics and factors in the hiring of an elementary principal and 12 forced choice items dealing with the hiring process in Iowa schools. Also, there was a question asking the respondents to identify the members of an elementary principal interview team and an open response question asking them to list prominent changes they have experienced in the recruiting and hiring process. This survey contained a total of 29 questions.

In early March 2000, a dissertation committee proposal meeting was held, and a human subjects review proposal was sent to the university committee.

Both were accepted and the researcher was given permission to move forward with the study.

### IASPA Participants

Marshall and Rossman (1989) stress the importance of focusing on a particular research sample in a study. In this study, members of the Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators (IASPA) were chosen because the association is the state affiliate of the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA). The AASPA is an association whose mission is to provide leadership in the promotion of effective school personnel practices within education through professional development activities and a broad-based resource network (AASPA, 2000) and is considered the premiere national school human resources association. Many of the approximately sixty members of the IASPA are school personnel administrators from larger school districts in the state. These school personnel administrators are considered leaders in their field because of their elite knowledge and experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1989) regarding the recruiting and hiring of school administrators in the state of Iowa.

The IASPA holds a statewide annual spring conference. In discussing the survey instrument and research project with one of the co-presidents of the IASPA, she suggested attending this conference as an opportunity for the researcher to enlist access and participation (Kvale, 1996) by members of the organization. The researcher attended the conference in Dubuque, Iowa, on April 6-7, 2000. This allowed the researcher to meet with other key leaders of the IASPA, begin to develop a rapport, and gain trust with the respondents prior to the time that the data were to be collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Also, at this conference the researcher met with a small, select group of members to discuss the purpose and methodology of the study. The seventh draft of the survey was distributed to this group and constructive feedback regarding the wording for responses was given. Based on this input, revisions were made and the final survey was prepared for distribution.

## Conducting the Survey

The survey instrument (see appendix A) was a self-administered questionnaire providing numerical and descriptive data that served as a framework for the subsequent in-depth interviews. A mailing of the survey instrument and a letter of transmittal (see appendix B) signed by the researcher and the IASPA co-presidents was prepared and sent to each member of the Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators on April 28, 2000. Participants received an envelope with the survey that was stamped and addressed to the researcher. The fax number for the researcher was also listed at the bottom of the survey for participant convenience. The letter of transmittal contained reasons for submitting the survey, assurance of response confidentiality, and the purpose of the study. Respondents were asked to reply within 10 days of the survey mailing date.

Prior to mailing the survey instrument, the researcher notified each of the members by e-mail to let them know that the survey would be coming and reminded them of the importance of their response. Ten days after the mailing date, another e-mail was sent to each of the respondents that had not yet



responded. The surveys were numbered to allow the researcher to know who needed to be contacted for a follow-up reminder.

Of the 58 surveys sent to members of the Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators, only two members returned incomplete surveys because they felt they could not fill out the survey accurately. A total of 44 surveys were completed for a return rate of 76 %.

### In-depth Interviews

Throughout the month of May, the researcher compiled survey data and developed the final in-depth interview protocol (see appendix C). Using networking techniques (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) with long time members of the IASPA, fifteen people who had completed the survey and were considered knowledgeable and experienced in the process of hiring elementary school principals were identified for the in-depth interviews. All fifteen of the IASPA members identified accepted the offer to be interviewed for the study. Three of the 15 IASPA members contacted could not participate because of time constraints. These 12 in-depth interviews were then conducted over a month

long period from mid June through mid July 2000. The researcher traveled throughout the state to meet with the interviewees in their environment at a time that was convenient for them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The in-depth interview served as a key source of data in this study by providing detailed descriptions from the survey respondents (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The first step in each of these interviews was obtaining "consent informing the research subject about the overall purpose of the investigation" (Kvale, 1996, p. 112) (see appendix D). The interview is different from a conversation in that you keep a record of it (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). For this study, each of the twelve interviews was approximately one hour long and was audio taped. The interviews began with small talk in order to establish rapport (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Then, each person was given a copy of the compiled survey results and the individual survey that they had completed for reference during their interview. All of the interviewees were asked to compare and contrast the compiled data and their responses in order to expand on the survey findings. The researcher utilized open-ended questions intended to encourage interviewees to speak freely and to allow flexibility in responding to queries (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Probing questions were used

when necessary to allow the interviewees to elaborate on or clarify a response (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The comments from these interviewees added to the researcher's general understanding of the problem of the study and provided insight and deeper understanding regarding specific survey results.

## Data Analysis

### Survey

In this study, the researcher utilized descriptive statistics as described by Thomas (1999). Questions 1 through 15, items of importance of principal's characteristics were scored by value {1 (low) – 5 (high)} and number of responses. These responses were then rank ordered by mean in order to establish a range of scores. Questions 16 through 27 regarding the hiring process were scored by value {1 (low) – 4 (high)} and number of responses. A fifth forced choice item, "unsure", was also a response choice for these questions. The responses were then rank ordered by mean in order to establish a range of scores.

Full tabulation results of the survey instrument are presented in graph and figure form in chapter 4 of this study. Responses to checklist item 28, requesting that the respondents record the people who serve on an elementary principal interview team, were scored for number and percentage of responses. This information, along with the responses to open-ended question 29, was infused into the findings and conclusions of the study.

#### In-depth Interviews

An interview protocol (appendix C) was utilized with each of the interviewees in order to obtain their individual response to the survey items. As suggested by Marshall and Rossman (1989), "The process of preserving the data and meanings on tape and the combined transcription and preliminary analysis greatly increase the efficiency of data analysis" (p. 112). The researcher did verbatim transcriptions of each interview which helped in the subsequent coding of data by subjects and organizing the codes into themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The researcher also took comprehensive hand-written notes during the interviews and kept a reflective field log (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) describing the researcher's reaction to the data and related research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

All of the transcribed interviews and hand-written notes were divided by interviewees and organized in a three-ring-binder notebook. The researcher used a progressive process of sorting and defining collected data by utilizing colored markers and Post-it notes to identify codes and themes when reading through the collected data.

### Validity and Reliability

In this study, the researcher conducted a survey and in-depth interviews with recommended school personnel administrators who were knowledgeable regarding elementary principal hiring processes. Nearly all of the responses from the surveys were consistent among the respondents. There were only a few instances when a score was marked on the survey that was inconsistent with others on any given item. In addition, throughout the duration of the study, the researcher asked colleagues familiar with the topic and research methodology to review the research goals, methods of data collection and analysis, and findings for feedback regarding conditions that might threaten the credibility of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, saturation (Gall, et al., 1996) of data was

achieved when the researcher began hearing the same or similar comments from the interviewees regarding the survey items. All of these operational techniques served to increase the trustworthiness of the study.

### Summary

This chapter presented the methods and procedures used to conduct the study. The two means of data collection included a survey containing 29 items and 12 in-depth interviews that were used to confirm and expand insight into the research questions. Key themes that emerged from the pilot in-depth interviews, along with information from the review of literature, were used to design the survey items. Data from the survey instrument were then used to develop the protocol for the final 12 in-depth interviews. Major themes and analysis from these data sources are presented in chapter 4.

## Chapter 4

### FINDINGS

The findings presented in this chapter are divided into two major sections.

The first section focuses on hiring considerations and reports those characteristics the 44 survey respondents and 12 interviewees felt were important in hiring an elementary principal. The second section refers to the hiring process or the manner by which districts typically hire elementary school principals.

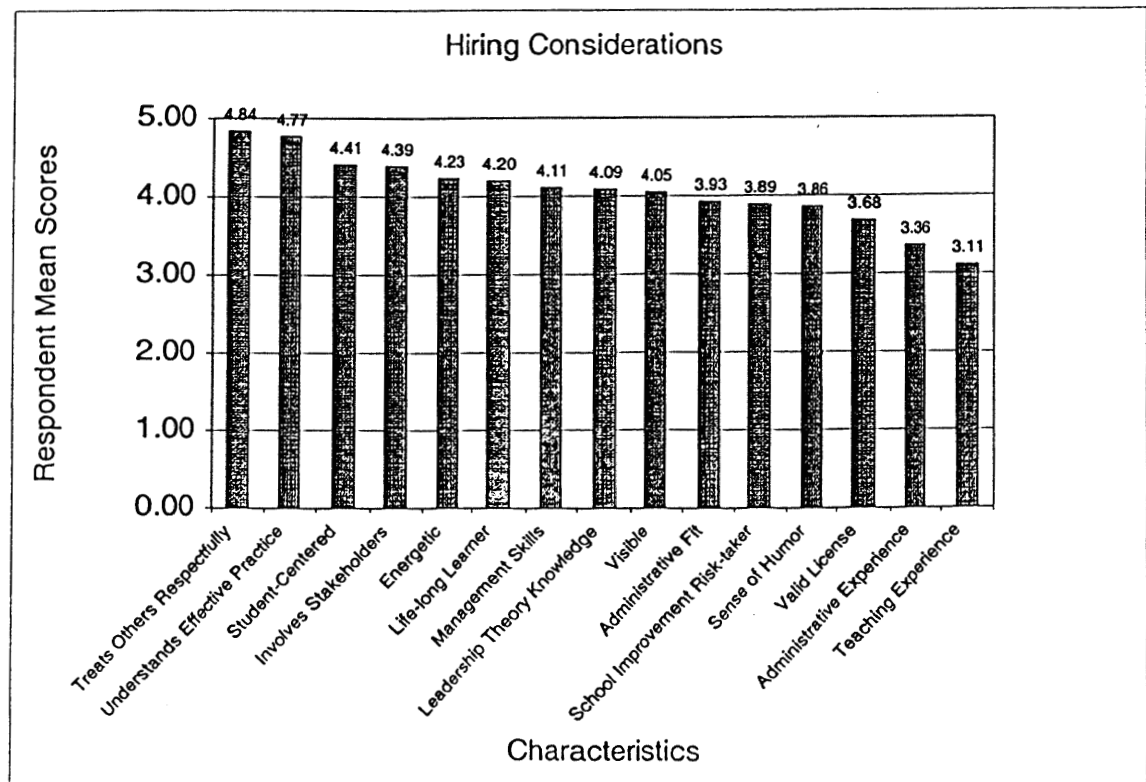
The 12 interviewees discussed some of the items on the survey instrument in more detail than others. Within the following sections the researcher purposefully included several lengthy quotations with the intent of providing the reader with enough detail to understand the meaning and context offered by the interviewees.

## Hiring Considerations

Section 1 (items 1-15) of the survey (see appendix A) asked respondents to indicate the characteristics they believed were important when selecting an elementary principal. Mean scores are presented with discussion of high and low scores. Data for the group and items 1-15 are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

### Hiring Considerations





Considering the mean scores for all of the responses to items 1-15, the three lowest ranked items involved teaching experience, administrative experience, and licensing. The lowest ranked item was item 12, "Has teaching experience/endorsements in a specialty area," which had a mean score of 3.11. Next lowest was item 15, "Has experience as a school administrator," which had a mean score of 3.36. The third lowest score was that of item 14, "Holds a valid Iowa administrative license," with a mean score of 3.68. It should be noted, however, that the three lowest mean scores were still of at least average importance when selecting elementary principals.

The item given the highest rating (4.84) was item 3, "Treats all individuals with dignity, respect, and sincerity." The second highest rated item (4.77) was item 2, "Has knowledge of instructional strategies." The next two highest items were item 11, "Prior professional experience indicates strong student centered philosophy" with a mean score of 4.41, and item 7, "Involves stakeholders in school-decision making processes," with a mean score of 4.23. Mean scores for the other items numbered 1-15 ranged from 3.86 to 4.23. All of these mean score items were ranked by respondents as average to above average in importance when hiring an elementary principal.

In order to expand on the findings of items 1-15 on the survey, all of the interview participants were asked to share their reactions to the survey data. For the purpose of discussion this information was grouped into the following four areas based on ranking and responses from the interviewees.

Table 1

Values and Respects Others

Survey Item	Mean Score
3. Treats all individuals with dignity, respect, and sincerity	4.84
11. Prior professional experience indicates strong student centered philosophy	4.41
7. Involves stakeholders in school decision making processes	4.39
10. Energetic	4.23
8. Models and encourages life-long learning and professional development	4.20
3. Is highly visible and actively involved in the school and community	4.05
9. Has a good sense of humor	3.86

Three of the four top rated items on survey items 1-15 are represented in Table 1. Considering the mean scores for all responses on items 1-15 on the survey, the respondents shared that the theme of respect and caring for others was the most influential consideration when they made elementary principal

hiring decisions. Item 3, "Treats all individuals with dignity, respect, and sincerity," had the highest mean score of 4.84. In addition, Item 11, "Prior professional experience indicates strong student centered philosophy," with a mean score of 4.41, and item 7, "Involves stakeholders in school-decision making processes", with a mean score of 4.39, were also included in this section. Item 8, "Models and encourages life-long learning and professional development", which had a mean score of 4.20 was another item in this area.

When interview participants were asked to respond to the survey data, it was clear that they all had something to say about this area. One interviewee expressed surprise that item 3 was not rated even higher:

I am a little bit surprised that the number 3 [treats all individuals with dignity, respect, and sincerity] item didn't get closer to a full 5. Just from the standpoint that I think the way in which you treat people is probably the most critical part . . . and that it didn't get a full 5 is a little surprising to me.

Another interviewee stated his feelings about the subject this way:

I think there are some characteristics that we can teach people and there are some that we can't teach people. I don't know if treats all individuals

with dignity and respect and sincerity . . . [is] something that I can teach you how to do. That is an area that if you don't have that characteristic, you are going to get in trouble.

This interviewee talked about the importance of treating “everyone” with respect, especially the students:

Treats all individuals with dignity, respect, and sincerity is a must for parents, for students, for staff. I like all individuals, because that doesn't mean they treat parents with dignity and respect and mistreat their staff. It doesn't mean they treat staff with dignity and respect and mistreat the parents. It has got to be someone who does it all [with] children [being first].

Another interviewee echoed this response:

I think that everybody is looking at that, not only in individuals, but especially treating kids that way. Even Iowa is becoming more diverse. We have to have that sensitivity. You can always tell from a person's past, by looking at resumes and making reference checks, whether they really care about kids, and that is what they are in this business for.

This interviewee shared that students are important, but he feels the staff is the critical group when it comes to respecting others and involving stakeholders:

Principals in my judgment are for staff . . . They have [to have] good one-on-one skills. If they have it with staff they are going to have it with kids, too. I think that what makes a building go are the staff, and when the principal has the hierarchy well thought out and does everything possible to elevate the staff and the students [so they] get a correct understanding of what school is all about. And, at the same time, they have the ability to be personable with kids when the situation demands it.

Finally, an interviewee shared how critical treating others with dignity and respect was in a recent elementary principal hiring situation in his district:

Definitely, the person treats people with dignity, respect and sincerity.

She had some experience, and she matched the building. This building had a principal for many, many years, a very good one, a good principal, but had done things that way for many, many years. So, it was going to be tough for someone to come in and make changes, and so we needed someone who makes changes but still treats people like they are valued.

This is one of the things we learned when we did reference checking about her . . . she could make change, but still treats people with dignity.

While having a higher mean score than many of the other items on the survey, item 10, “Energetic” only had one comment from an interview participant. However, it sent a strong message about why it received such a high score on the survey:

One that I want to especially comment on is item 10. The energy, I had that marked as a 5. I just think it is so hard for anybody to think about being a principal these days without having everything wound up and ready to go.

Every participant in the interviews spoke about the importance of having a sense of humor, and most shared surprise that it only scored at a mean score of 3.86. These are some of the comments they made:

Number 9, has a good sense of humor, I put that as a 5. I think that is critical because if you can't find humor in the job, I just think that is a real important characteristic at times. I know for myself personally, when I start to lose my sense of humor that is when I know that I am struggling and need to take some time off.

That tells me that while they are taking their job seriously, they can see some humor in life and will enjoy it. I like to see some humor in a person.

The ability to smile and it becomes infectious. I was surprised to see that one kind of down there a little bit.

In my opinion I think if you don't have a good sense of humor you are not going to survive in this job, if you can't laugh at yourself. Because it is such a high stress occupation, that if you don't have that, you just as well look for something else I think, because you are not going to survive.

Poker face doesn't go . . . especially when you are talking about working with young kids. They expect you to be able to joke around with them a little bit as well.

This interviewee shared how a candidate that did not display a sense of humor almost lost an opportunity for a job in a recent hiring situation:

We were down to two very, very close candidates. We almost didn't pick the person we did because she was very, very dry. That was exactly what the superintendent said to me when we were sitting down and looking at them, because I think he was leaning towards the other person. He said, she doesn't make me laugh. She doesn't make me smile. I did everything

I could in my half and hour with her to make her smile. But the more you get to know her I think that she has just a real dry wit.

Another interviewee talked about how much the children enjoy a sense of humor in their principal:

It is a real way to reach out to children who are struggling and to motivate. It seems like kids like that in a building principal. If you can joke with them, it helps coming to school . . . staff like it too. But children, I think, was my main thing I had in mind there. Make learning fun.

This interviewee discussed item 4, "Is highly visible and actively involved in the school and community", and shared:

Highly visible and active in the school and community is always important. People like to see their building principals out there. We get that an awful lot. When we interview and do some site visits on our final selections at all the levels, we always hear that. Especially from kids . . . that kind of stuff really sticks out.



Table 2

Knowledge of How Schools Work

Survey Item	Mean Score
2. Has knowledge of instructional strategies	4.77
6. Possesses strong school management skills	4.11
13. Demonstrates knowledge of effective educational leadership theory and practice	4.09
1. Is a risk taker when considering school improvement	3.89

According to the mean scores for all responses on items 1-15 (see Figure 1), the second most influential set of considerations in the hiring of elementary principals was in the area of the actual work that goes on in an elementary school. Four items on the survey pertained to this broad category (see Table 2). Item 2, "Has knowledge of instructional strategies," with a mean score of 4.77 was the second highest rated item overall. Three other items were included in this area. Item 13, "Demonstrates knowledge of effective educational leadership theory and practice" which had a mean score of 4.09, item 6, "Possesses strong school management skills" with a mean score of 4.11, and item 1, "Is a risk taker when considering school improvement" with a mean score of 3.89.

One interviewee talked about the importance of instructional knowledge and the instructional demeanor he looked for when hiring an elementary principal:

I would say knowledge of elementary curriculum and some basis of experience having multilevel experiences and things of that particular type. In my judgment, nothing brings a staff along quicker than when an elementary principal begins to feed off of their staff on what they are doing, how we are doing, and where we are going to go. A lot of people don't have that trait. They don't listen and their demeanor is that I am the principal and I know it all.

Another interviewee reacted positively to the survey and the high mean score of item 2, "Has knowledge of instructional strategies" and item 3, "Treats all individuals with dignity, respect, and sincerity" this way:

This rings of collaboration, it rings of a different type of leader . . . It is the difference between leadership and management. They are working with individuals . . . they are not managing the business of the school. They are moving a group.

One interviewee was surprised at the low score of item 1, "Is a risk taker when considering school improvement." This is what he shared:

It seems to me that if you are going to get innovation, you are going to get change. If you are going to get improved test scores or whatever your goal is in a building, you are going to have to have somebody that goes in there that is going to be a leader and take somewhat of a risk. Now there are calculated risks, and [the survey item] doesn't say calculated risks, it just says risks, you don't want them to do something stupid, but you want them to do something that involves a little more.

This interviewee talked about his thoughts on risk taking and said:

I believe that we are looking for people in our district that are willing to be risk takers. We don't want the same old same old. We want somebody that is going to break us out of the paradigm that we are in and take us to the next level, and I think you have to be a risk taker to do that.

Another interviewee talked about how his definition of risk taking might be different than others and how it may have affected his rating on the survey:

Is a risk taker when considering school improvement, I scored that low, a 2, and it came back as a 3.89. It may be that my definition of risk taker in

school improvement . . . is that . . . with school improvement efforts it should be research based. When I think of risk taker . . . I was thinking that [might] be shooting from the hip and we have got to stay away from that.

He went on to share an example of when his school district hired a risk taker:

We hired a new principal at one of our year around schools and that person was on staff at that school, so she had lots of experience in what was going on there. But she came in with some ideas and beliefs that I think took us out of the daily grind in this school and to some things that we believed she would really be able to take us to the next step, and I believe she has done that.

In addition to risk taking, a number of interviewees also commented on the importance of management skills. One interviewee shared a story regarding the importance of building management skills that reflected well what most of the interviewees said about Item 6, "Possesses strong school management skills":

While leadership is the thing, you still have to have the management. I remember [a professor] when I was going through his program, he was always comparing the two to a bicycle and saying that management was

the back wheel, the one that is chain driven and drives the machine. The front wheel is the leadership and steers it where you want it to go. That is kind of how I have viewed it is along that line, because if you can't take care of the management part, you are never going to get the leadership part in there.

Table 3

Licensure Requirements and Experience

Survey Item	Mean Score
14. Holds a valid Iowa administrative license	3.68
15. Has experience as a school administrator	3.36
12. Has teaching experience/endorsements in specialty areas	3.11

Each interview participant was asked why they felt item 12, "Has teaching experience/endorsements in specialty areas," item 15, "Has experience as a school administrator," and item 14, "Holds a valid administrative license" came out as the three least influential hiring characteristics on the survey. One interviewee echoed the thoughts of many when he explained why he thought these items scored an average importance level on the survey by saying, "I think those are just far secondary to the issues of integrity, energy, leadership,

instructional concerns, and so on. Those are more of the housekeeping sorts of things.”

Despite its lower mean score, the issue of administrative licensure drew varying responses from the interviewees. One interviewee stated, “To me, holding a valid license would not be really important from the standpoint that you can get temporary licenses. If you weren’t able to get a temporary, then that probably would be more critical to me.” Another agreed saying, “I think that the state is helping us with licensure. We are able to get a provisional in an emergency . . . I believe that the state will work with us with the licensure, so I don’t think that is that important.”

A third interviewee talked about how he felt getting the right person for the job was really important when dealing with the licensure issue:

We hired a principal from out of state a few years ago, knowing that it might not be easy [to get it] through Des Moines (i.e., Iowa Department of Education), and it wasn’t. It took months to get the whole thing through, and he had to take a couple of [graduate] courses. To us it is more important to hire the right person than to worry about what the people in Des Moines are going to think.

Others were not as receptive when it came to candidates that did not meet licensing requirements. This interviewee was one of those:

I honestly believe that if somebody thinks they want to be a principal . . . they have gone through all the steps and should be ready to take a principalship. I think that we are competitive enough in our district, internally and externally, that we wouldn't even talk to somebody that didn't have licensure.

Another interviewee shared her experience and concern about hiring someone without certification:

We hired an administrator that wasn't done [with his educational program]. It took this administrator four years to get that. We made a time line, the school that the program they were in cancelled and the candidate was almost done. He had to transfer to another school, and, of course, they had different hoops you have to jump through. So . . . I wouldn't say [we were] burnt on this, but . . . I have to verify to the superintendent that when we sign a state report that people are certified.

A third interviewee talked about what other people in the school and community would think if his district would try to hire an elementary principal that was not certified:

Not in this community . . . I have got people that are looking over my shoulder all the time . . . I don't think they would [let me] hire someone on a provisional even if they can walk on water.

Survey item 15, "Has experience as a school administrator," also drew different types of comments from the interviewees. The ranking on this item prompted one interviewee to say, "My colleagues are seeing the reality of the hiring situation in Iowa. We are not going to get people with experience in the next three years, we are going to have to take some risks and train some people."

Another interviewee reacted to the survey item and talked about the fact that people surveyed for this study were from large urban and suburban districts in the state, and because of that he did not think those districts would settle for inexperienced candidates:

The only time that we might deviate away from that [prior experience] would be if it were an internal candidate. My guess, as I look at [this



question], a larger district has some individuals that they think highly of as a teacher in the district and those are the individuals they may be hiring. I still think for a large class school, it would be a very rare situation that they would bring somebody in from the outside of their district with no experience.

This interviewee went on to explain the importance that both prior administrative and teaching experience was in the recent hiring of an elementary principal:

She had been involved in two or three different districts [as a teacher] . . . so she brought in kind of a different perspective. She had done a whole bunch with parents and getting them involved in the decision making process. So, I think those things stuck out for her by far. She had experience as an elementary principal.

A third interviewee was candid about her thoughts that an experienced administrator did not necessarily make for a good choice:

I definitely believe someone coming in without any experience can do a good job. If they have had experience in it, and they were very good at what they did, I favor the experienced administrator [especially] if you

happen to have a difficult situation in a school. If you have a difficult staff, if you have difficult parents, if you are trying to implement new curriculum, it is nice to hire someone that has already done those things and you know they can be successful, because a brand new administrator is a risk. But, [lack of administrative experience] is not a reason to not hire them.

The lowest ranked item with a mean score of 3.11, item 12 “Has teaching experience/endorsements in specialty areas” drew some comments from the interviewees. One responded to the survey score and said, “I am a little intrigued . . . as much as education is becoming specialized today, it kind of intrigues me that they didn’t view that as being more important.”

Another interviewee added:

I am surprised it is that low . . . but it is kind of icing on the cake in a way.

If they do have an endorsement in some area, we have one that has an endorsement in early childhood, we have one that has an endorsement in special education, [and] we have one that has an endorsement in reading.

You can really see how that influences and makes a difference in what they are able to do.

One of the other interviewees had this to say:

What I like about [this survey item] is [the] background in something other than administration. I happen to come from a state that we could not have a Master's degree in administration and be an administrator. [There] you had to have your Master's degree in another field. I got mine in reading. Then your endorsement came, you got an endorsement to be an administrator, and that was like twenty hours above your Master's. The reason for that is they wanted you to broaden your background before you became an administrator.

Two of the interviewees talked about why they felt that the prior teaching experience in specialty areas was not very important. One stated, "I don't think that is that important. I think a good principal is a leader. You can be a leader in physical education as well as special education. Another interviewee agreed by sharing, "I believe that . . . if you have the skills for an administrative position, I believe it doesn't really matter what kind of specialty areas you have. I mean I think you could be an effective administrator at all levels if you have the skills."

Table 4

Organizational Fit

Survey Item	Mean Score
5. Values, goals, and personality are a “fit” with the administrative team	3.93

Many times we hear of the importance of a “match” or “fit” for a position when elementary principals are hired. Item 5, “Values, goals, and personality are a ‘fit; with the administrative team,” had a mean score of 3.93. This means that it scored just below the above average score of 4.0. During the in-depth interview process, each of the interviewees were asked what they would rather choose, a candidate that is more qualified for the position based on educational needs, or someone that would fit better with the rest of the school community and administrative team?

In nearly all of the interviews, the participants responded that they would rather choose the candidate that would “fit” with the administrative team and community rather than choosing someone that held some of the other qualifications cited. Although the ability to relate with students, parents, staff and administrators in the district were critical factors (as noted previously), the

philosophy of the district was mentioned time and time again by the interviewees as having strong influence on their final hiring decision.

One interviewee shared this:

Because we have a group of 23 administrators, I always like to look for someone who can bring a different kind of skill to that group so that there can be some diversity among our administrators. Particularly at elementary where you have [a number of] buildings you don't want everybody to be exactly alike. I would like to think we could find somebody that may be bringing some strength that we don't have in our current administrative staff.

The concept of qualified versus fit got this interviewee to talk about the importance of diversity, but not at the expense of where the district was going:

If a person was highly qualified but was just going to be a lone ranger . . . we don't want diversity at the expense of where the district is going. In other words . . . we want people to be independent, but we also want people to be interdependent. We don't want someone that is going to be so far out that they will never go along with the direction that the district is going. We don't want some loose cannon out there that is just always

going to be making decisions that create turmoil. We do want people out there that are pushing the envelope a little bit to make decisions that will make us a stronger district, or to be able to raise concerns in a legitimate fashion.

The thought of getting school employees to look at candidates outside of their comfort zone when hiring was discussed by many of the interviewees. One person used the following example to illustrate how districts need to continue to broaden their thinking when hiring new principals:

The administrative team [we have] here has been pretty solid, although every time we hire a new person I am concerned [whether] we [are] doing something to improve us as an administrative team, as a district, as a building, or are we trying to be comfortable? A good example [would be] when we hired an extremely successful band guy here a couple of years ago, one of the last comments I said was, this guy is who we need, but don't think he isn't going to drive us nuts a few times. That was so true.

The interviewee went on to say he would choose a candidate with a better "fit" because he believed you could train someone in the necessary skills:

I think there are certain skills that an administrator has to have, but I think that a majority of those are things that you can pick up and be trained [to do]. I think that fit is something that is personality, human traits that aren't learned, there are things that the person either possesses or doesn't possess.

When asked to give an example of a time when "fit" made the difference in an elementary principal hiring decision in his district, he explained:

We had an elementary building that opened up again last year, and an internal candidate was one of our current elementary principals. He was a better than average principal . . . yet the way he handled people and handled the community was different than what we wanted in this school. This school had a history of the community being upset with administration, so this [experienced] person was not a good fit into that job. We ended up hiring a teacher that was in that building, that had gone through all the problems that had gone on the last five years, who had the ability . . . she was kind of a lead teacher that always was talked about as being the person that solved problems. [She] was able to communicate

with the people, so when she applied we all jumped up and down and were happy she applied. She got the job over a seasoned veteran.

Not only administrators feel the need to have a “fit” when making an elementary principal selection. One interviewee talked about his district’s former hiring process and how it allowed staff members at the building level to choose someone that ‘fit’ their status quo. In this case, it was not the choice that the interviewee agreed with:

If I go back to the process that we have and if we tend to have the people in the building, they like to pick someone who is like them. That is not always good. So . . . then I would say that I would pick someone with more of the qualifications [and less fit to the current reality].

When asked if he would like to share a story of when this might have happened in his district, the interviewee said:

We had position open in a building that had a long time principal there, and he had allowed his teachers to become too much the stakeholders and the power brokers in the building. We had a candidate who was a teacher in the building versus other candidates that, in my opinion, were far more qualified. When it came to the end of the day . . . we spent . . .



four hours with them after a day of interviewing trying to process and get them to be more open minded about what they saw that day. It was a set up . . . we had no other choice than to pick the person that was their colleague and their teacher friend. It was that or start over in the process, and in this particular instance we interviewed very late in July, [when] the candidate pool was not [there], and so [the superintendent] was boxed in . . . that, in my opinion, was a very bad experience. I could not convince them and it got ugly in that processing.

Another interviewee was even more specific about the qualifications versus status quo fit question and said:

I have to go with the most qualified person. But, in saying the most qualified person, one of the qualifications is that they have the skills and abilities that are needed for that particular building. Maybe not to fit with that building where they are, but what is needed to move that building where it needs to go. Because we don't want more of the same . . . a lot of the schools have developed and are moving on an initiative that is ready to go. The individual that is there may or may not have had the

skills to move them in that direction. But, we certainly want someone who is able to do that.

Finally, one of the interviewees shared that he did not think that you should separate the most qualified candidate from the candidate with the “fit.” He shared:

Well, I don’t think you can separate them . . . the two go hand in hand, and I think that you have to look at a community and what [their] expectations are. Different communities have different expectations. The educational program isn’t going to work if it doesn’t fit within the context of what the community would expect.

#### Most Important Characteristics

The survey instrument indicated item 3, “Treats all individuals with dignity, respect, and sincerity,” as the highest rated hiring consideration characteristic with a mean score of 4.84. All of the interview participants were asked to react to this and were then asked what they considered to be the “most important” qualification for an elementary principal.

The response that each of the interviewees gave to this question corresponded with the findings on the survey instrument as to the importance of

establishing relationships with other people. To provide the reader a better understanding of the perspectives offered by the interviewees, all twelve of their responses are listed below:

I would have to go with personality.

I look for integrity . . . they have to be able to lead people, to take a group of people from where they are someplace else. I guess it is wrapped up in a vision as well as getting people to go there . . . they have got be able to build relationships.

Integrity.

Making sure that they dignify or respect all people, kids and staff and community.

They have got to enjoy children.

Someone that can effectively solve problems by working with people and, in the background of all of this response is, better instructional programming.

Rapport with staff and the ability to mesh with the administration . . . there should be sort of an unpredictable thing, too.

A person who is a good communicator, they have to be bright, they have to be a person that I see as being able to motivate people, and a person we can trust.

Ability to get along with people.

I think it has got to be their ability to establish trusting relationships. Take all the knowledge in the world, and it doesn't do you one bit of good if people don't respect and trust what you are trying to do.

Adaptability to change. We are in a society today and a profession today where change is going to continue to accelerate. If you don't have people who are willing to change, and to look at how they do business, and how we are going to approach learning, they will never be at the level that I think we want them to be.

Courage to be committed to something. The ability to transmit that to their staff. Which is a lot like risk taking, I guess. People can be risk takers but most people only take a risk when they know the odds are in their favor, but what if you don't know the odds are in your favor or not? I think that is what really stands out now.

The final interviewee shared that he felt “likes people” was the most important characteristic that an elementary principal can have. However, he then went on and described his thoughts in more detail and related them to survey items 1-15:

We design our questions and our interview to get at the candidate’s experiences . . . [and] knowledge. We design our writing component to get at a candidate’s ability to communicate in written form. We ask them to get on a computer and do a technology piece. We do the evaluation component . . . to have them recognize good teaching. I want them to sit down with the candidate in the evaluation part and do a reflective conference with that individual. All of these things are . . . tied into communication skills, they are tied into the ability to make people relax, make people be able to talk. When we call references . . . the best indicator of future success is past performance. It is a multifaceted process.

### Negative Characteristics

All of the interview participants were asked to share any characteristics that they consider as a negative in a candidate during the hiring process. Some

of the interviewees talked about the importance of quality application materials.

The quote that best summed up the feelings of the interview participants was,

“Paperwork, it is hard to discount when their initial paperwork is not well done.

Subliminally, it stands out.”

Most of the other comments about negative factors that were shared by the interviewees were directly tied to the ability of the candidate to relate to others. One of the interviewees shared that she has a hard time with “Arrogance . . . It turns off staff, it turns off parents, and turns off kids. My way or no way does not work.” Another interviewee agreed and shared his thoughts this way:

If a candidate was highly dictatorial, my way or the highway type of a person, I think we are very concerned constantly on involving and engaging the staff in a collaborative manner to come up with decisions.

When you look at the change research . . . [Michael] Fullan says you can’t mandate what matters. Well, someone coming in and saying this is the way it is going to be and that is the only style that is ever used, that person would probably alienate people around here very quickly. So someone who came in as very arrogant, who came in as very dictatorial . . . would probably not be received very well. There is a fine line between

confidence and arrogance. We want confidence. You have to have someone that will persevere, that will get up every morning and come into work, get up every morning and think 'here we go.' You can't have someone who crosses that border that becomes arrogant and dictatorial.

This interviewee tallied how many times a candidate uses the word "I" in an interview:

One of the things that makes me crazy in an interview is the individual says I, and all of the initiatives that happen in their school I did them. I even get into this silly game many times when I am tallying how many times they say it. A negative is the individual that focuses more on . . . the management tasks than the leadership role or the individual who sees their role more in the realm of management than leadership.

A candidate's grammar and appearance drew attention from this interviewee:

If they would say they don't believe all kids can learn, then they are out of here. That would be a big negative in this district. Shabby appearance would be a real negative for me. The other thing I have run into is

extremely poor grammar in an interview. You can tell that their communication skills are a zero.

Not recognizing others was a negative to this interviewee:

They don't speak about staff, they don't speak about finding what is needed for the different publics in their particular building, or they can't verbalize anything about current trends of what is happening. For instance, in reading or in other critical areas where their own base experience is so limited. You can tell a textbook type of response from something that I have experienced.

Making a good first impression was also recognized by many of the interviewees. One person summed up its importance when she said that she is concerned when, "A candidate bores me. If I find my mind wandering, that is a red flag. I am in the profession of reading people, and so eye contact is very important, good hand shake, a good first impression is important."



## Hiring Process

Section 2 (items 16-27) of the survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which specific items were currently used in the hiring of elementary principals. Mean scores for the survey group are presented with follow-up discussion of the low and high mean score items from the interviewees. Data for the group and items 16-27 are presented in Figure 2. Because the low scores in this section of the survey data received significant responses from the interviewees, they are presented first in this section.

Figure 2

Hiring Process

Considering the mean scores for all of the responses to items 16-27, the lowest rated item was Item 18, "Using candidate screening services", which had a mean score of 1.57. Next lowest was item 27, "Visiting the community of final candidates", with a mean score of 2.18. The third lowest item was that of item 21, "Recruiting nationally", with a mean score of 2.40. These low mean scores indicate that these were the only three items rated as being almost never or infrequently used in the hiring process of elementary principals.

The item given the highest rating was item 16, "Develops specific criteria," with a mean score of 3.82. The second highest rated items were item 25, "Interview performance of the candidate," and item 20, "Recruiting statewide," which yielded mean scores of 3.75. The next highest rated item was item 26, "Having the candidate meet with teachers, parents, students, and community members," with a mean score of 3.59. Mean scores for the other items numbered 16-27 ranged from 3.48 to 3.04. All of these mean score items were ranked by respondents as being frequently used in the hiring of elementary principals.

In all of the twelve in-depth interviews conducted in this study, the interviewees were asked to respond to the survey data in order to provide the reader with more detailed information and experiences about the findings.

### Screening Services

All of the interviewees were asked to respond about the low mean score of item 18, "Using candidate screening services." Many of the responses in the interviews correlated with the low mean score of 1.57 for this item. When probed

about this low score, all of the interviewees described some sort of principal perceiver instrument when they responded. One interviewee stated:

I will be real honest with you, I have had building principals who are real believers in the perceiver inventories and I am not . . . it has been around long enough, hell, I have got copies of it, I wonder who else has got copies of that perceiver stuff?

A second interviewee said, "I think most people can't afford the screening service, and most people want their own feel on that and not somebody else's."

Another interviewee stated, "I have gone and heard the spiel on the principal perceiver. I think that while Gallup probably has done enough research to say that this and this must occur, there is still that unknown inside impression."

Finally, an interviewee summing up his feelings on the perceiver instrument said, "The candidate screening service is not important to really much of anyone, including ourselves."

Of the 12 interviewees, only two utilized some sort of screening service in their district. However, both of these interviewees spoke passionately about their belief in a principal perceiver system. One interviewee stated:

We believe in and have had a lot of satisfaction with using a screening device . . . we now are doing it with all teaching candidates . . . we have in the last two years used the principal perceiver for every principal . . . we use it automatically to start with. I don't believe that it tells you how good of principal somebody is going to be, but I think it does hone in on the traits about how they treat people, what their feelings are for kids, and what their feelings are for staff members. I can tell you that we have gotten off the telephone doing interviews with the principal perceiver and looked at each other and said, "that is not a person that we want in our district." We have eliminated candidates with that.

Another interviewee shared, "We use the SRI administrator perceiver. It is not a finalizer but it gives you some additional information, because when people answer seventy questions, some things do surface."

One interviewee who does not currently utilize the perceiver instrument in his district also spoke very candidly about his feelings for the perceiver instrument by saying:

It is kind of a sad scenario. The way I look at it, here we have people who have developed what I think are instruments with outstanding reliability,

and we still want to go with our gut rather than what people are really telling us or are able to tell us. It is hard to break old habits, and people don't want to go back and get retrained. I am a believer in them personally, but as a district we have been unable to, I guess, come to a consensus that it is something we want to use. I think it is just a matter of time until most all school districts will be using perceivers . . . I think it will probably be a requirement within state laws. It is very important that you be able to say that you have gone out to try to get the best candidates that might have an interest in your district to look at before you make that decision.

### Community Visits

The second lowest mean score of 2.18 was that of item 27, "Visiting the community of final candidates." A number of interviewees spoke about this item and many of them shared that their school district does not currently utilize site visits. Many of their responses correlated with this interviewee who shared:

I think the reason we have not [done site visits] is that we have felt comfortable with the candidates, we feel that we know them pretty well by the time that we get done with them. I think that it is probably a positive to

go out and to visit communities. We certainly have that opportunity to do that in our process if we want to . . . but we have never chosen to do it.

A second interviewee was not surprised that the community site visit did not have a high score on the survey instrument. His comment was:

I think that the primary role is to be the instructional leader for that building, and I think you can learn how good they are based on your interview and their paper materials and with the people that you visit with regarding their references. I don't think it [a site visit] would add to the process.

Another interviewee added, "in our last 10 or so hires, we have never gone to visit, but we sure have worn out the telephone lines."

Only two of the interviewees shared that their district currently does regular site visits for the final candidates. One interviewee talked about a recent site visit in which, "Our superintendent and I actually drove up to the candidate's place of employment and did a site visitation. We interviewed teachers in the building, we interviewed people in the community, we were there for probably two or three hours." The other interviewee currently using site visits shared a story where it was the difference maker in his school district's hiring decision:

We had two people and we thought candidate A was a hair above candidate B. We did the site visit, and it completely reversed and we offered it to B. We take one person off of each of our interview groups, this last time when we interviewed we took a community member, two staff members, along with the superintendent, deputy superintendent, and myself and did the site visits.

### Recruiting

There was a significant difference in the mean scores when comparing item 21, "National recruiting" (2.40), item 19, "Recruiting within the system" (3.04), and item 20, "Recruiting statewide" (3.75). The discrepancy among these scores prompted a number of discussions from the interview participants.

Every interviewee mentioned that recruiting within the system at a minimum means posting principal openings and making them available to employees within their own district. Beyond this agreement, recruiting within the system took on a variety of configurations according to the interview participants. One interviewee said, "When I see the word recruiting, I think we make employees aware here of our openings. To my knowledge, we have never gone



out and actually held somebody's hand and said 'hey do you want to look at this job'?"

Another interviewee shared how their district will sometimes "call everyone that we know is certified in the district and say here is the opening if you are interested we encourage you to apply, if you are not, that is fine." One interviewee told how his district takes this a step further:

We typically have a standard understanding that if you are an internal candidate you will at least get an interview . . . for the most part I would say it is much more than just a courtesy interview. It is people who are proactively applying for a job who are usually pretty good candidates, too.

In the eyes of one interviewee, internal recruiting is a must. He stated, "Get them started, and get them assisted. You save yourself a lot of time, and if there is talent there, you are capitalizing on it rather than having them walk out the door and take positions elsewhere like we do. We have a lot of them walking out the door."

On the other end of the spectrum, two interviewees addressed the disadvantage internal candidates have in the recruiting process in their districts. One said, "I think that you are never a prophet in your own home. So, I think it is

difficult for someone within the system. I think it is real hard, and I think we are going to have to be a little bit more open minded about it.” Another shared:

We have identified the people who have administrative degrees. We have encouraged people to get their degrees . . . there is also the feeling that it is really hard to move up within your hometown, and I think there is some truth to that, too. I have a good friend in a school that we taught in together and he was excellent and all of his skills were incredible, and he probably has done the best job of anybody I have seen do it. But, even at best, it was difficult for him to switch his hat from teacher and he even went to another school and was an assistant principal for a while, and then was hired back as the principal and it was very difficult.

The concept of recruiting in Iowa drew the following statement from one of the interviewees. He talked about it this way:

I think that Iowa is very unique in that we don't really recruit. We don't have to because we have the Des Moines Register that you can open up every Sunday and you know exactly where all the openings are. A lot of states don't have that. Here we have a ready-made system for people to

know we have an opening. So we have a tendency then to sit back and let them come to us, rather than actively recruit.

Another interviewee described recruiting as being as simple as keeping a list:

I recruit all the time, and I tell others to recruit all the time. Whenever you meet someone, a dynamic person, you kind of file it away. The administrative team in the district where I worked was asked to just develop a list of people you meet ongoing, and keep it going. Right now minority candidates are just impossible to find. So, I keep a list of them . . . that you run in to or hear about that may be teachers that you think you could develop or bring on board.

Every interviewee mentioned the Des Moines Register as their most widely used recruiting tool within the state of Iowa. Many spoke of the expense of advertising in the Des Moines Register, and one participant echoed the thoughts of the others stating, "By gosh, it is \$400 a shot! The only good thing about it is it is still the most effective single thing you can do."

Some of the interviewees spoke of their allegiance to Iowa candidates.

One shared the following:

To say that Iowa is parochial in the sense that we really like to hire from within or we like to hire Iowa people . . . and I am not just talking my district . . . I think it is very true. Even people that go out of the state and come back have more success from my experience than, if you get somebody from Texas and they want to move to Iowa, I would think they would have a pretty hard time with it.

Another interviewee shared a similar thought:

I think each state has some uniqueness to it, I think each state has some particulars that a person coming into the state of Iowa has to understand the state of Iowa. What are the standards and benchmarks? What are we working on? I want someone who has an experience in that, and our statewide search would be much more appropriate for us than a national search probably.

An administrator agreed by stating, "I think again it comes down to a philosophical situation, in which you believe if you hire somebody from within your state who knows the education system within the state, that those people are going to be better off." One interviewee shared, "The best people are right here in the state. I think Green Valley has done two national searches and whom

did they hire? They hired their assistants and people inside the system. It is just there.”

As a whole, the interview participant group did not share a great deal of success stories in their national recruiting of elementary principals. The placement of advertisements in the national publication, Education Week, was mentioned by nine of the participants as a tool that they used to recruit on a national level. All of the interviewees utilized their district Internet web site to post vacancies. Another tool that was mentioned for national recruiting outside the state was the use of advertisements in newspapers for cities such as St. Louis, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Detroit, Los Angeles, Dallas, and Chicago. The use of the University of Northern Iowa, University of Iowa, Iowa State, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison placement offices were also mentioned as national recruiting tools. The School Administrators of Iowa web site was also mentioned as an advertising tool. Only two of the twelve interviewees shared that they have successfully hired an elementary principal as the result of a nation wide search.

Most of the interviewees were not surprised at the low mean score of 2.40 for national recruiting. Interviewees were asked why they thought the national

recruiting score was so much lower than the statewide score, and most were quick to respond. One interviewee said, "I don't think elementary principals make enough money to recruit nationally. People aren't going to travel across the country for a \$50,000 or \$60,000 job." Another shared, "I think we have probably had the luxury that, in our state, there are a number of good candidates. I don't know that we have ever felt the need to recruit nationally. I wouldn't say that we make it a high priority that we are going to go with a nationwide search." One interviewee described the following experiences with national recruiting:

Our experience has not been very good nationally. We have spent big bucks with putting ads in Education Week, we have sent and tried to recruit minority administrators by advertising in the Chicago Tribune and Kansas City Star, and we can't find anybody in those other regions to come to this area. I don't think the cultures are the same . . . and I am not talking just talking about minorities. I am talking about people living across the country, and so we are getting to the point where we believe that what we want, number one, if we can grow our own we would be very happy with that. Number two, we believe that the core values are the same throughout the state of Iowa.

Another interviewee shared his views on national recruiting:

I tried that [national recruiting] the first three years that I was here. I ran ads in Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis and every now and then we would get somebody to say they were interested. But, normally when I ran those ads, even though it talked about having Iowa certification and experience, I got truck stop managers from outside of Peoria that were applying for principal positions.

At least one interviewee disagreed with the thought of not conducting a national search. She spoke candidly:

I think Iowa sometimes thinks that only Iowa can take care of Iowa, and I think that is a major mistake we are making. I think that we should look outside the state to see who can infuse our system. I think we could be better by being more open-minded [by] looking to ideas of building principals and other administrators that were in other states.

### Interview Performance

Item 25, "Interviewing performance of the candidate," was one of the second highest rated items with a mean score of 3.75. This is also an area that drew considerable feedback from the interview participants. The responses to

this item varied from feedback from interviewees that felt this was the critical piece of the entire process to those that felt it was overrated.

One interviewee talked about the importance of the interview performance this way:

The way our process is set up you get one hour, maybe two, to lay it out on the line, and if you don't have a personality that is open and charismatic, you are at a disadvantage. Because of the [interview] teams that we have, they don't have a chance to call references . . . all they see is that one half an hour or forty-five minutes that they have with you, and they have a great deal of power and influence in the decision.

He then went on to share this personal interviewing experience:

I have had administrative situations where we did phone interviews, and they were very charismatic on the phone. This person came in with great credentials, came in on the interview day and was just annoying. She also was just overbearing. I was with her for five minutes and ready to go.

Another interviewee talked about the interview performance this way:

To me that is the first chance you get to see the person face to face. Even though you have a lot of background on these people . . . the average



person takes seven seconds to make up their mind if they like them or not.

They have to interview well because they have to sell themselves. We are interviewing them [and] they are interviewing us . . . they just have to be able to pull the interview off.

This interviewee talked about how she felt it was important for the interview performance to link up with the candidates written materials:

I think the important piece is the consistency between how they present themselves in writing and how they actually respond. Because I have seen some individuals, I am saying, get them in here! And then, when they come and you get to talk to them, you understand that they are better writers than they are building principals.

Two interviewees talked about the interview being a "pressure situation."

The first interviewee shared:

I think that it is [important] because that is our opportunity to see this person in action. Granted it is not like running a school, the day to day things, but yet it is a high-pressure situation that you are able to see how that person is going to perform.

The second interviewee talked about the pressure of meeting with more than one group:

I think that it is a simulation of a pressure situation, and that if they handle that well they can handle just about anything . . . I mean people are nervous but they are still able to construct their answers and communicate well. If they can't communicate to that interview group, what will happen if they get in front of a television camera or you have to speak in front of the whole student body or parents or whatever it may be?

Not everyone spoke of the interview performance as such a critical piece.

In fact, this interviewee felt quite differently:

I guess that I have seen too many dog and pony shows in interviews. I think that you have to look past the interview. Some people have a knack for interviewing. It is a skill . . . and that is important for the job. In other words, if you are a good interviewer most likely you can relate well in a public environment. But I also know it can be a façade. So you have got to look past the interview. I am not going to hire the person who just is very charismatic and all of a sudden just blew me away, and I walk out of there and think this is it. I have got to know more.

One other interviewee shared his feelings about the interview performance holding too much influence. He said, "I am much more interested in a site visitation than I would be what that person says at the interview. I think the interview is a very natural component . . . but I want more than that."

### Establishing Specific Criteria

With a mean score of 3.82, item 16 "Developing specific criteria for the position," was the number one rated item on the hiring process portion of the survey.

Each of the interviewees agreed that this was a critical component as the hiring process begins and proceeds. The majority of the interview participants verbalized that the establishment of criteria for the position is developed at an administrative level and then shared with the building level interview team.

One interviewee summed up the importance of developing criteria this way:

I think that is the crux of the position. Asking, what do we really want for this particular position? I think it is also critical because there is no standard laundry list for a building principal at any level . . . the needs of the schools are so unique and so different.

Another added, "We take a look as best as we can at what the building needs. You have got to know what you are looking for so that you ask the right questions . . . your questions should come from your criteria."

In some cases, the interview participants acknowledged that the criteria are developed in a collaborative manner with the building staff. One interviewee stated:

What we typically do is determine what we are looking for in a building.

There are some standard things in terms of leadership and preparation, then we meet with the building site council team and their staff, and they brainstorm some of the criteria they want in determining their leader.

Then we take that into consideration in our search. Many times some of those specific things are reflected in the ad.

One interviewee felt that establishing specific criteria for a position was important to him personally, but expressed his surprise at the overall mean score being so high. This is what he shared:

I really wonder if people really do develop specific criteria for positions.

Because, it seems to me sometimes, when I see ads that school districts use the same time after time after time, it tells me that they do not develop

specific criteria. I am a little bit surprised it is that high. I am wondering if that is really true.

### Credential Screening

A hiring component that was not listed as a specific item on the survey that received attention from the interview participants was the task of the initial screening of the applications. In all twelve of the interviews, school personnel employed at an administrative level were responsible for the screening of the applications, but none of them said that it was solely up to them. In half of the cases the human resource director was the person doing the initial screening. However, they still made the applications available to others. One interviewee shared, "I do an initial screening. However, I always give the team the option to go through the entire group of applications if they want to, and they have the right to pull any of those applications out. Typically, they do look at them all." Another human resource director shared that she is responsible for the initial screening herself, but then usually "ask(s) one other person to come in and fill out the sheet independent of me, and then I compare them. For this most recent one, I asked a curriculum director."

In the other half of the cases, a variety of administrators were involved in the screening. The use of a team of screeners was important to a number of the interview participants. An interviewee described it this way:

I like to have everything done by a committee. That way it is much easier to defend and very simply I am always, I have on my mind the equal opportunity. We want to make sure that everybody has a fair chance.

The superintendent, the deputy superintendent for administrative services, the associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction, and myself all take part in the screening.

#### Reference Checks/Informal Networking

These were both items on the survey that drew considerable feedback from the interviewees in their discussions. The concept of reference checks and informal networking were seen as a necessary and important part to the overall hiring process by all of the interviewees. All of the interviewees talked about the importance of networking with others in order to obtain and screen potential elementary principal candidates. One said:

There are individuals in this state . . . if they call me and say you really need to look at this person, it is not because they are of a particular

system, it is because I trust their professionalism so much that I give them a look.

The discussion got interesting when the concept of the “good old boy” network came up. Each interviewee was asked to elaborate on the idea of it is not what you know, but whom you know that gets you the job. As discussed in the U.S. Department of Education’s Principal Selection Guide (1987), a quality hiring process should eliminate the ability for this to take command of a hiring situation.

Eleven of the 12 interviewees acknowledged that they believe there is a “good old boy” network that is alive and well in the state of Iowa. However, many did not perceive this as a negative factor in their discussions and all of them stressed the fact that their hiring process does not allow the “good old boy” network to take control of their district process, and that they use it strictly as a networking tool. In the words of one interviewee, “the bar has been raised for educational leadership . . . if you look around, many of the principals years ago used to basically be coaches or people who had success in those types of positions. Where now we are really looking for educational leaders.”

Another interviewee described it this way:

It makes me think that there is a positive to that . . . and that is the right people know your skills. They can see that you are a fit. The negative [of] the good old girls club or the good old boys club [is] where it really doesn't matter that much about your skills, you are one of their friends. I agree so much of it is who you know, because they know you are good! Now that [can] work against you . . . because when you are not good and they know it, who you know keeps you from getting the job.

Expanding on the same theme, this participant addressed how networking might get you an interview, but not the job:

In our environment . . . if I get a call from Susan Johnson or a Bill Brooks that they know this individual and they say you need to take a look at them, well I am going to put more stock in it. That is not bad. To say that you have to know somebody in order to get an interview with us or get a job with us, that is not accurate either. Because, if on paper somebody really looks good . . . I want to find someone who I know who also knows the candidate. I would like to find somebody that I know [and] that person is going to tell me the truth. If there is a good old boy system . . . it might get someone an interview, but it is not going to get someone the job.



One of the strongest voices summed up the thoughts of the majority of participants this way:

The longer you are in this business, the more acquaintances you make. If somebody tells me that they had a teacher or administrator that is blue chip, I believe it, and to me it is worth a closer look. Just because they tell me they are good doesn't mean they are going to get an interview. But, I think that separates some of the candidates . . . if we do interview him or her, it doesn't hurt to have people sitting in my chair or the superintendent's chair that are willing to say good things about you, you can bet that.

Two of the interviewees expressed caution about the concept of informal networking and the good old boy network becoming a negative factor. One gave his thoughts this way:

I don't think our process allows a good old boy situation to happen, but in the past what happened in this district, four or five to ten years ago, it was who you knew and people knew that. So there was a morale problem for people trying to get into administration in our district.

Another interviewee cautioned that the superintendent does make the final recommendation to the school board, and the good old boy network could happen this way:

I suppose it could [happen] from the standpoint that in the end, the superintendent makes the final decision, and if that person at some point decided that they wanted to go with a candidate that would be within that realm that we are talking about, then it could happen.

#### Hiring Process Descriptions

It was evident that all of the interview participants had a hiring process in place that they felt met the needs of their school district. All of the interviewees were asked in their interviews to describe what the typical hiring process looked like in their district. No two hiring processes were found to be the same. In order to share this breadth with the reader, four hiring process descriptions were chosen to illustrate the wide variety currently in use throughout the state. This is intended for discussion purposes only and is not intended to imply evaluation or preference of one or more processes.

An interviewee described how her district had all of the finalists meet with the teachers at one time. Her school district hiring process looks this way:

We advertise for an opening, we screen the credentials, we choose the candidates we feel would bring the most to the table, and then select those candidates to interview. Prior to doing that, we do check references, and the paperwork. We bring them in and they interview with our superintendent, they interview with the director of support services, and myself, individually. They meet with staff, they meet with other administrators, and sometimes community members . . . this year we put five of the candidates in the room at one time, and they met with the teachers all at once. We . . . ask for strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. We don't ask them to rate the candidates. Same with the central office staff and the administrators, we ask for strengths and weaknesses and then we present all that to the superintendent and then the superintendent and myself make the call.

A second interviewee discussed how candidates rotate and meet with four different groups throughout the process. He shared:

Primarily we will bring four candidates in at a time . . . they will meet with four separate interview groups, and each group is actually made up from 6-10 individuals. They will meet with a group of administrators . . .

[involving] central office plus . . . elementary principals. I like to have at least four elementary principals involved in that plus myself and the deputy superintendent and associate superintendent for [curriculum and instruction]. They will also meet with a second group that would be the staff from the building . . . I like to have from six to ten and it involves classroom teachers and support staff, and especially the building secretary. The third group that they meet with is a group of parents that volunteer. The fourth group is a one on one with the superintendent. Each of the groups that I have mentioned previously are given copies of a letter of application and resume of each of the applicants in advance. I meet with each of those groups . . . about questions they can't ask . . . and give them plenty of time to formulate their own questions. I then come back in and they give me a copy of it and then I will review that with them. I let them know that their feedback is extremely important, but the final decision rests with the superintendent.

Another interviewee shared how candidates can come into contact with fifty or more people during the hiring process:

We look at the applications and screen [them] . . . to interview around five.

Then they [go] to several interview teams. It would be a day long process

. . . the cabinet level would have an interview, which would be the central

office positions, including directors of curriculum, human resources,

business, everyone at the central office location. Then it went to the

building where the principal was going to work. There was a building team

that was comprised of teachers and parents. Then it went to the

administrative team, which would be the team players that this person

would work with, the other building principals and other administrators.

Also this person went to lunch with different people from the administrative

team, and it would be different than the ones who were interviewing them.

So, through the whole process, they may become involved with fifty or

more people that would then give input back to the person making the final

decision.

Finally, an interviewee spoke about using a performance task and site

visitation in the process:

This last one we had probably around forty-five candidates and we

narrowed the field down based on some rubric of information. We

narrowed the field down to what we thought were our top fifteen, we then went out with three teams of people, and we did half hour screening interviews with each of those fifteen people . . . and then we narrowed the field down to six. From there, we engaged the staff. We had an interview team that had a lower elementary, upper elementary, related arts, and special education teacher on it. We also had a couple of associates and a building secretary and an administrator on the interview team. That was one component. We also had an administrator interview team . . . so there were two interview sessions going on. We had a writing component, and we had a presentation component. We had a teacher that volunteered to videotape herself and we did an evaluation component, where the candidates had to watch 10-15 minutes of a video and then sit down with this teacher and do a post conference. We had a tour of the building that our head custodian gave, and we had a question and answer period with the retiring principal. We brought all of those different groups of people back, and we spent the afternoon going through each of the candidates. We narrowed the field down to what we thought were our top two. The following day our superintendent and I actually drove up to the

[number one] candidate's place of employment and did a site visitation.

We interviewed teachers in the building [and] we interviewed people in the community.

Through data on the survey instrument and the in-depth interviews conducted, it is evident that in general each of the school districts involved in the study had a hiring process in place. A typical hiring process included the establishment of specific criteria for the position, and advertising and recruiting campaigns that were designed with the criteria in mind. An administrative team screened the applications in order to determine who would be selected to go through the school district hiring process.

The typical hiring process included a team or teams of different school and community members. At a minimum, this process included some sort of interview performance task. In some cases, the hiring process involved many more components. After completing the steps of the hiring process, the superintendent makes a hiring recommendation to the school board. Typically, the superintendent will receive feedback from the team members that were part of the hiring process, but in the end, it is his or her decision as to who should be recommended for employment.

### Critical Components

The survey instrument indicated item 16, "Develops specific criteria," as the highest rated hiring process component with a mean score of 3.82. The interview participants were asked to react to this and were asked what they felt the most critical hiring process component actually was.

One interviewee discussed the fact that the hiring process itself was the most important piece. He described it this way:

I think the hiring process itself is critical. In those periods of time when you don't necessarily attract the best people that you don't lower your standards and keep the purity of the process itself intact. Patience is real hard . . . sometimes you want to get these positions filled, but you can't compromise your standards and what you are looking for.

Half of the interviewees shared that they felt reference checks were the most critical component of the hiring process. One interviewee shared the importance of reference checks by stating, "The telephone references with informed people who can intelligently comment on what the person has done in the last few years, because no matter what, the best predictor of success is how they have handled things in similar situations." Another added, "It is very



important that you not call just who they have given you to call. Call anyone they have worked with. Make sure on the application that they have signed that you can call anyone that you want.”

An item discussed at length elsewhere in this paper, interview performance, was mentioned by four of the participants as the most important piece of the hiring process.

Another participant eluded to the “doing” piece of the process as being most critical for him:

I like anytime you can put candidates in a situation where they have to do something, whether it be give a presentation, or lead an evaluation conference, or even having to write about something. I like those things better than when we sit down and do a traditional interview.

### Current Versus Past Practice

All of the interview candidates were asked to describe how they have seen the hiring process evolve during the course of their career. Each of the interviewees agreed that the hiring process definitely does look different than in the past. In the majority of their responses, the interviewees spoke of the increased participation and collaboration with other school and community

members in the recruitment and selection process. One interviewee stated, “I think the biggest thing is more involvement. Especially from stakeholder groups and there is a lot more interest . . . we gave stakeholder groups a chance to get involved with the process, and they now relish it. They expect it.” A second interviewee shared that “We believe that it is important [collaboration] because there are different groups, different communities involved within the community that they need to be involved in it.” Another interviewee said:

It is much more engaging to have multiple individuals involved in the process. The old days of the superintendent sitting down with a candidate and that is the only extent to the interview, that won’t happen.

Providing power to collaborative groups was mentioned from a different perspective by one interviewee who shared, “In fact, I think we are starting a backlash now to try to pull some of that back. The pendulum is swinging back toward giving the superintendent some power and to his or her team.” Another interviewee added, “I do think, sometimes, that there are certain groups who come in with biases and know they are biased.”

Some of the interviewees shared examples of the hiring process found in the past that illustrated how it is different from their current collaborative model.

One interviewee talked about the fact that, “When I started, the process was very autocratic. Because a superintendent would say I am in charge . . . and a lot of times it was the ‘good old boy’ network . . . and the collaboration and opening it up and exposing this person to a lot of different publics raises a lot of good questions.” He spoke of his own personal hiring experience when he was hired as an internal elementary principal candidate:

The first time that I was hired, I sat down with the superintendent for my first principalship, and the superintendent and I interviewed, and he told me right there after the interview that I had the job. I was a teacher in the district. He also told me . . . not to tell anyone that I was applying. He said, ‘I always tell the in-house applicants that because everyone will call me, and I will hear everything in the world about these applicants’ . . . and he wanted to make the decisions . . . that was 1985-86. So there has been a big difference in the hiring from then until now.

Another participant spoke of his experience as an external principal candidate:

One principal job that I went to interview for six years ago was the superintendent and myself only. I did have an elementary principal take me on a tour of the district . . . but I did not speak to anyone other than a

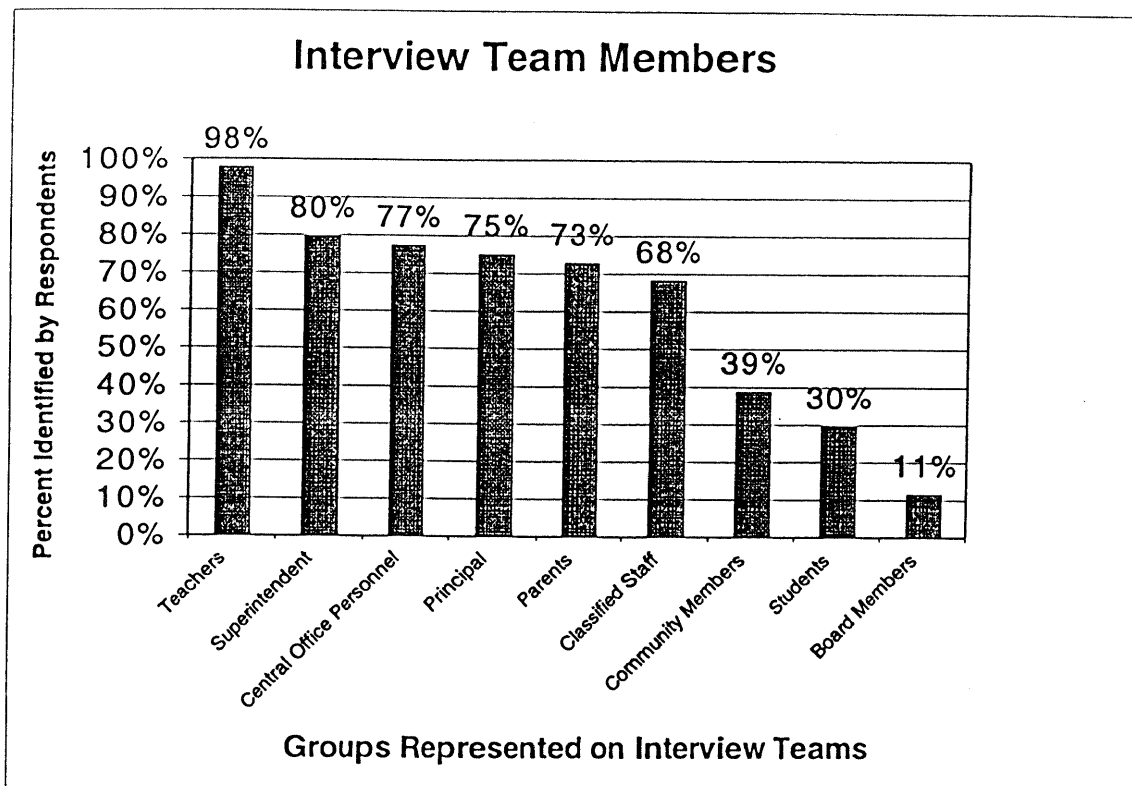
retiring principal for about ten minutes. I just got a tour of the building, did not talk to any staff, didn't talk to any students, got home the next day, and [the superintendent] called me and said that you are in the final two . . . we would like to visit your district. I said, 'How many people will you be bringing?' [He said], 'Just [himself], and he was going to make the final decision.' That, right there, was enough for me.

In addition to the agreement that collaboration has allowed many stakeholders an opportunity to be involved in the process of hiring elementary principals, some of the respondents also felt that deeper reference checking of the candidates is also a major evolution in the hiring process. One interviewee stated that, "I don't think anymore in this district that you would come in and we would only check your last job. We would go all the way to the beginning." A second interviewee added that he has seen a real increase in telephone references with, "informed people who can intelligently comment on what the person has done in the last few years. Because no matter what, the best predictor of success is how they have handled things in similar situations recently."

Two of the interviewees eluded to the job market itself and how it has changed. One interviewee shared, “It is much more competitive. We have a real concern with finding those viable candidates . . . so I guess the biggest change is just the marketplace itself and the lack of people who are looking for jobs and are qualified candidates.” A second interviewee agreed and said, “the whole job market has really changed. I mean, even in nine years I have seen a huge difference in, put an ad in the paper and you get 300 applications, versus we really need to wave our flag, and we need to pound on some doors.”

In order to determine the different members of the school and community that might serve on an elementary principal interview team, item 28 was created. Figure 3 presents the findings of the survey respondents.

Figure 3

Interview Team Members

The largest percentage (98%) responded that teachers are a part of their school district's elementary principal interview team. The next highest percentage was that of the superintendent (80%). Four other groups including central office personnel (77%), principals (75%), parents (73%), and classified staff members (68%) were marked by over half of the respondents. Community members (39%), students (30%), and board members (11%) were not as well represented on interview teams as indicated by the survey data.

### Prominent Hiring Changes

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to add comments that they have seen occurring in the recruitment and hiring of elementary principals throughout their careers. Thirty-six responses were submitted. Some of the answers were repeated, therefore the following responses were included to provide the reader an understanding of the different thoughts provided by the respondents. The responses fell into the following themes.

### Involvement of Others

The involvement of others in the selection process was one theme that received a number of responses. One respondent stated, "The most significant change has centered around the involvement of stakeholders in the selection process." Another stated, "Teams of parents, community, teachers and support staff wield more power in the selection . . . the superintendent must garner their support for a candidate . . . no matter how much he/she wants or doesn't want someone." Other responses included, "We have involved more staff in the selection process," "Expansion of stakeholders in the hiring practice," and "Broader base of consensus. Greater emphasis on building-level input."

## Recruitment

Another theme reflected in the responses of item 29 was that of recruitment. It should be noted that all of the responses in regard to recruitment involved the recruitment of internal candidates. "Recruitment has changed dramatically. Ten years ago ads were placed in various educational journals and newspapers. Last year no ads were placed, only postings within the district and all three were from within the teaching ranks." Another respondent stated that, "I believe more districts are beginning to grow their own administrators. The pool of veteran administrators continues to get smaller." Another stated, "My last hire was from within and has worked out beautifully. I see the quality leadership from within." This was echoed by, "More internal recruitment for degree work toward a long term goal of filling positions from within." A final response was, "The last elementary principal we hired was from within the district. He was not our first choice, but that is the way it worked out. Not getting strong candidates for many positions let alone administrative ones."



### Instructional Leadership

There were a number of comments from respondents in regard to instructional leadership. “The biggest change I have observed is the emphasis placed on instructional leadership skills rather than management skills. There is also a greater need for principals who can work effectively with diversity, especially viewing diversity as something to value, celebrate, and not ‘deal with’.” Another stated, “Many have only a ‘surface level understanding’ of the job. They can say the ‘right words’ but cannot view the job from a ‘process/systems’ leader perspective.” One respondent shared, “Leadership over management – the ability to lead a council for school improvement and turn building goals related to student achievement into successes by rallying and leading an energized staff” was important. Another stated, “Much greater emphasis on ability to be student centered and accountable for student achievement.”

### Quality of Candidate Pool

Some of the respondents commented on the shrinking and quality of the elementary principal candidate pool. One respondent stated, “Fewer applicants are willing to commit to the pressure and time requirements of the principalship.”

Another stated, "Continued decrease in experience and training from the pool of applicants." Other responses included, "There are fewer and fewer qualified candidates," "It is more difficult to find a large pool of good candidates," and "Candidates with quality experience were available in greater numbers earlier than they are now." Finally, one respondent stated, "We seem willing to make more compromises. Formerly we sought the 'ideal' candidate. Presently, we seek to hire the 'best' candidate."

### Summary

This chapter presented the findings from both the survey instrument and the in-depth interviews that were conducted for this study. Data in the first section of this chapter focused on hiring considerations. Specifically, this section focused on the characteristics that the forty-four survey respondents and twelve interviewees felt were important when hiring an elementary principal. Four major characteristic themes were derived from the data and presented. These themes included value and respect for others, knowledge of how schools work, licensure requirements and experience, and organizational fit. Negative characteristics

confirmed by the interview participants included arrogance, a dictatorial leadership style, poor communication skills, poor-quality application materials, and an unprofessional appearance.

The second section focused on the elementary principal hiring process. This section referred to the hiring process and the manner by which large urban and suburban districts typically search for an elementary school principal. It included a description of the survey data and analysis of this data provided by the in-depth interviewees. In addition, interviewees described how the hiring process has changed over time and what they felt are currently the most critical components. Data were given describing members of a typical elementary principal interview team. Finally, comments from survey respondents describing prominent hiring changes were presented.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this study was to find out what school personnel administrators considered important when hiring an elementary school principal. The intent was to learn from members of the Iowa School Personnel Administrators (IASPA) which characteristics influenced them in the selection of elementary school principals. The researcher also sought to find what a typical elementary principal hiring process consisted of and how and why it was different from the past.

The two means of data collection included a survey containing 29 items and 12 in-depth interviews. These interviews were utilized in an interactive process of confirming and expanding insight into the research questions. Key themes that emerged from the pilot in-depth interviews, along with information from the review of literature, were used to design the items on the survey instrument. Data from the survey instrument were then used as a basis for the protocol used in the 12 follow-up in-depth interviews.

This chapter discusses the findings of the study, offers conclusions, and suggests possible implications. The chapter concludes with final recommendations for future study.

## Discussion

### Important Hiring Considerations

Four broad hiring considerations respondents in this study considered to be important were: (a) relationship builder, (b) knowledge of how elementary schools work, (c) licensure/experience, and (d) organizational fit. In many ways, these areas are interrelated, however, for clarification to the reader, they are discussed separately followed by a brief summary.

#### Relationship Builder

Studies conducted by Baron (1990), Dillon (1995), Karol (1988), Tesar (1994), Newberry (1977), and Van De Water (1987) were examined in the review of literature section of this study, and each revealed particular emphasis on human relation skills when making the decision to hire an elementary principal.

Listening, being open and honest, warm and caring, sociable and out-going, the ability to work with a wide variety of people, and flexibility were some of the human relations skills that these studies found to be of value.

This study reflected similar findings in that data from both the survey and in-depth interviews indicated that valuing and respecting others were crucial characteristics for an elementary school principal candidate to be hired.

Respondents agreed that for a candidate to be successful, the person must value all stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, and students) and treat all stakeholders in the school setting with dignity and respect.

The collaborative nature of school leadership, or the ability to involve and engage staff, parents, and students in teaching and learning activities was also found to be crucial for an elementary principal candidate to be hired. The survey and in-depth interview data indicated that top-down leaders were not well received by the majority of school personnel administrators who were part of this study. The old school theory of “my way or the highway” seemingly is no longer viewed as relevant or appropriate in many of the larger school districts in Iowa. The ability to relate with people and work with others, especially in affecting change and not merely maintain the status quo, was seen as critical by nearly all

of the interviewees. Many of the interviewees mentioned that they were looking for a candidate who was willing to take an individual risk and get others (i.e., administrators) to “think outside of the box.”

Another key to working well with others and developing strong relationships was having a good sense of humor. Nearly all of the interviewees discussed the importance of this personality characteristic and many of them indicated surprise that the mean score on the survey (3.86) was not higher. Interviewees also indicated that a smile, the ability to laugh at oneself, charisma, an upbeat personality, and the ability to make others laugh were also important characteristics in a successful candidate. In addition, the survey indicated possessing a high level of energy, being highly visible and active in the school and community, and modeling and encouraging life-long learning skills as critical characteristics.

The respondents were quite clear that although these are all key characteristics, they are also very difficult to ascertain during an interviewing process. To a certain degree these are dispositions people possess, not necessarily skills that can be easily taught.

The findings in this section of the study reinforced and coincided with the data already found in the existing literature. The need for strong human relation skills in an elementary principal candidate has been consistently documented in the literature over the last two decades and continues to exist today.

### Knowledge of How Elementary Schools Work

Current research suggests that a principal's instructional leadership is one of the key factors in ensuring school effectiveness and productivity (Harchar & Hyle, 1996; Young & Schmidt, 1998). In order to be an effective leader, an elementary principal must focus their work on the issues of learning, teaching, and school improvement (Van De Water, 1987; Karol, 1988).

More recently, the National Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards (1996), have clearly reiterated the need for knowledge of good instruction and also acknowledge that school principals must have excellent decision making skills regarding operations, organization, and resources of the school. One interview participant put it plainly, "If you can't take care of the management part, you are never going to get the leadership part in there."



Both the survey data and the in-depth interviews in this study reflected previous studies and the ISLLC standards. All indicated that a successful candidate must have a strong knowledge base of school improvement, elementary curriculum, and an understanding of effective leadership strategies. Most interviewees also emphasized the need for someone who would take research-based risks in order to move a school and community from an existing paradigm to the next level of performance.

Clearly, instructional leadership was key, but at the same time, both survey and in-depth interview data revealed that was not enough. In addition, all respondents felt that an elementary principal must possess the keen organizational skills to effectively manage the day-to-day operations of the school. If he or she cannot take care of the “nuts and bolts” on a daily basis, their ability to serve as an instructional leader can be drastically reduced. For all the respondents in this study, knowing how schools work in terms of balancing the daily instructional and management tasks were keys to being hired.

### Licensure Requirements and Experience

The Iowa State Board of Educational Examiners has established criteria for candidates wishing to obtain a Professional Administrator's license in Iowa. At the time this study was conducted, the criteria for obtaining a valid Iowa elementary principal's endorsement included: (a) holding or being eligible for an educational license, (b) verification of five years teaching experience of which at least three years must be at the level of endorsement desired, and (c) successfully completing the requirements for an administrative endorsement (Iowa Department of Education, 2000). Some school districts in the state choose to hire a principal candidate who does not meet all of the necessary criteria to obtain a valid Iowa principal's endorsement. In these cases, school districts say they usually work with the Iowa Department of Education to obtain a provisional license for candidates.

In this study, the items on the survey dealing with administrative licensure, teaching experience, and administrative experience were considered to be of above average importance according to the survey respondents. However, the level of importance for these three characteristics was not as high as the other hiring characteristic components completed by the survey respondents.

The majority of the interviewees supported the data from the survey and indicated that the items regarding professional licensure were of secondary importance to those characteristics or dispositions of integrity, energy, collaboration, management skills, and instructional leadership. Most of the interviewees went on to clarify, however, that while having a valid license did not hold the same degree of significance as other criteria, their school and community likely would not allow the hiring of an elementary principal without Iowa licensure. Many of the interviewees cited the fact that particularly the parents and teaching staff would not be supportive of a candidate that did not meet all of the licensure requirements. To put it bluntly, dispositions, knowledge, and skills were considered most important, but the governmental stamp of approval signifying to professionals and public that the candidate has passed at least some assessment criteria was generally deemed politically and/or symbolically necessary to garner support for a candidate.

In terms of administrative experience, most of the interviewees indicated that they preferred hiring a candidate that had previously been a principal or at least performed some administrative duties (e.g., assistant principal, special education director, guidance counselor). However, in general, internal

candidates without prior administrative experience have a better chance of getting hired in large Iowa school districts than inexperienced external candidates from outside Iowa or another school district. In a few cases, the interviewees shared that their district would simply not hire a candidate without prior administrative experience.

On the other hand, teaching experience or teaching endorsements in specialty areas was considered by some of the interviewees as “icing on the cake.” A few of the interviewees shared that they felt specialty area teaching experiences were important, and these can influence the knowledge base of an elementary principal as a leader. However, the majority of interviewees indicated that a strong leader could develop from any type of teaching background and they were more concerned about the individual leadership skills of the candidate and that the person held a valid administrative endorsement rather than specialized teaching expertise.

### Organizational Fit

An examination of the literature for this study concluded that many elementary principals are selected based on an image or “fit” that a school district

has of what their top candidate should look like. The literature reviewed offered discussion of educational leadership as a primary consideration for hiring. However, many times translating this characteristic into specific criteria does not occur. In other words, candidates often compete on their “fit” to local values and beliefs and are not selected on their knowledge and understanding of school leadership.

Studies by researchers Baltzell and Dentler (1983b) and Van De Water (1987) found that in numerous cases selection criteria for principal positions were vague and subjective and allowed for considerable subjective variation depending on who was part of the selection process. As Thomas (1986) clearly pointed out, this local version of “fit” can frequently prevent a realistic assessment of candidates, particularly women and minorities, and thus serve as a barrier for obtaining the position.

In contrast to the literature, participants in this study shared the importance of both developing and implementing specific criteria for each position. Participants discussed the significance of establishing the requirements that allowed a school district to cite exactly what they were looking for in a candidate. This was mentioned not only in terms of what everyone wanted

regarding expertise, skills, dispositions, and experience, but also in terms of specific needs for the district and/or school. Most thought that by drawing up specific guidelines and criteria they increased their chances for selecting the right person for the job.

In fact, hiring a candidate who has values, goals, and a personality that “fit” with the administrative team was considered to be an above average characteristic by the survey respondents with a mean score of 3.93. However, it should be noted that nearly all of the interviewees gave the distinct impression that this item should have been ranked even higher. When asked, all spoke in terms of the critical importance of “fit.” The interviewees spoke of “fit” being important not only with the administrative team, but also with the parents, teachers, community, and students.

### Summary

When hiring an elementary principal in large Iowa school districts it was evident from the literature, survey data, and in-depth interview data that being a relationship builder and having knowledge of how schools work were the key characteristics that respondents in this study considered important. It was also

noted that the concept of organizational fit was found by most as critical, and that a valid license and prior administrative experience were considered to be of above average importance. Clearly, it is possible for a candidate to be a relationship builder and have knowledge of how schools work without holding a valid license, prior administrative experience, or organizational fit and still be hired as an elementary principal. However, in the majority of the school districts that were a part of this study, it was found that for a candidate to be hired it was likely they had to possess all of these qualifications.

### The Hiring Process

Nearly 15 years ago the U. S. Department of Education issued the Principal Selection Guide (1987), a document focused on and stressing the importance of a comprehensive selection process. Further analysis of the literature revealed an agreement among other writers as to the major elements of the recruitment and selection of elementary school principals (Anderson, 1990; Baltzell & Dentler, 1983b; Baron, 1990; Dillon, 1995; Goodlad, 1983; Hersey, 1980; Kahl, 1980; Karol, 1988; Manasse, 1983; Newberry, 1977; Richardson &

Prickett, 1990; Sashkin & Huddle, 1988; Tesar, 1994; Zakariya, 1983; and Van De Water, 1987). Some of the major elements of the hiring process identified by most of these authors included the development of a job description and criteria, advertisement, heterogeneous screening committees, widely based recruiting efforts, candidate assessments, performance tasks, and interviews.

Clearly each of the school districts involved in this study followed what these sources emphasized and did have a comprehensive hiring process in place. Each of these districts had a human resource administrator who was responsible for coordinating and steering the hiring process ship. From the survey data and the in-depth interviews, it was evident that developing specific criteria for each position was considered to be one of the most important activities in the hiring process. Participants discussed the importance of establishing specific criteria in order to know exactly what you are looking for in a candidate. A typical hiring process included the establishment of specific criteria for the position and advertising and recruiting campaigns that were designed with the criteria in mind. An administrative team screened the applications to determine who would be selected to go through the school district hiring process.



At a minimum, this process included some sort of interview with a team of people. In some cases, the hiring process involved many more components such as candidate performance tasks, site visitations, and written examinations. Typically, the superintendent received feedback from the team members who were part of the hiring process, but in the end, it was his or her decision as to who would be recommended to the school board for employment.

Both the survey and in-depth interview participants shared that the elementary hiring process has changed from the past. In the majority of their responses, the interviewees spoke of increased participation and collaboration with school and community members both within their district and across the state in the recruitment and selection process. Networking among references and trusted colleagues was cited by most of the respondents as being extremely important. The old days of the school superintendent or a team of administrators sitting down and single handedly interviewing and selecting an elementary principal no longer occurs in larger Iowa school districts. The current changes in the elementary principal hiring process have occurred because school districts have found positive reactions by both professionals and the public when utilizing a variety of stakeholders in the process.

## Conclusions

1. A candidate who is hired as an elementary principal must be a “people” person - someone who first and foremost values and respects others.

Participants in this study indicated the primary characteristics they considered when hiring an elementary principal were that the person “. . . treats all individuals with dignity, respect, and sincerity.” In the simplest terms, respondents stressed that they were looking for a principal who likes people – students, teachers, and parents. They sought out those candidates whom they perceived act with integrity, exhibit collaboration skills, have a good sense of humor, and through good communication develop trusting relationships with others. On the other hand, candidates who appeared to adhere to a more hierarchical, top-down mode of operating and/or who indicated even a hint of bias in their treatment of others likely would not be seriously considered for an elementary principal’s position in these districts.

2. A candidate who is hired as an elementary principal must have a strong working knowledge of both instruction and management.

Respondents in this study agreed with the recent standards set by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (1996) which focus on matters of establishing and maintaining quality learning environments. They clearly indicated that what they wanted was a well-rounded and intelligent candidate who possessed a thorough understanding of instructional program issues and the interpersonal skills to effectively articulate and facilitate quality school improvement. In addition, they also wanted someone with the skills to ensure the management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment. Clearly, the bottom line for them was that a candidate should not apply for an elementary principal's position in their district unless s/he possessed a strong knowledge and understanding of what makes for an effective elementary school in today's society.

3. Hiring networks are alive and well in Iowa.

Informal networking was considered by most respondents in this study as highly important in the recruitment and hiring of elementary school principals.

While the state is geographically large, the educational community in Iowa is a tightly knit group. Within districts and across the state people know each other -- often times on a first-name basis. All interviewees told stories or cited instances of various people -- superintendents, school personnel administrators, principals, and teachers -- who used their personal contacts to follow up on recommendations and obtain additional information on elementary principal candidates.

Although most large Iowa school districts typically use established criteria such as possessing a valid Iowa administrator's license and prior administrative experience, networking among references and trusted colleagues characteristically was cited by most of the respondents as an equally viable avenue of information they actively sought. In fact, all but one of the interviewees mentioned networking both within the district and across the state could impact -- either positively or negatively -- whether someone received an interview for the job. One of the interviewees summed up the importance of networking when he stated, "in our last 10 or so hires . . . we sure have worn out the telephone lines."

For most, this meant that getting hired in the respondent's district was a matter of two things: what a candidate knew as well as what others knew about the candidate. Everyone discussed how the "good ol' Iowa" network could influence the likelihood of whether or not a person received an interview and thus was seen by most as a strong, albeit subtle influence in the hiring process of these districts. On the other hand, all interviewees were very outspoken about the fact that since the current hiring process now includes a number of participants, these collaborative efforts help prevent "who you know" as being a sole criterion for hiring an elementary school principal in their district.

### Implications

1. Personal dispositions that depict fairness, integrity, and trust are very difficult to assess during a short-term contrived interviewing context. Most of the participants from this study voiced considerable concern that in most, if not all instances throughout the interviewing process candidates had on a game face. This easily put into question the accuracy of assessing key characteristics such as personality, sense of humor, energy, fairness, integrity, and trust. Indeed, several interviewees expressed grave concern

over an undue reliance on the interview itself to determine whom the district hires as an elementary school principal. Several mentioned they thought when districts relied too heavily on an interview for a hiring decision that it made everyone vulnerable to hiring someone who knows how to interview, but whom may not, in the long term, possess the dispositions it appeared they had when they were hired.

As noted in the literature and the findings of this study, there are a number of strategies that districts could utilize to provide a more comprehensive assessment of candidates. These instruments might include community visitations, school visitations, oral presentations, writing activities, administrator perceiver instruments, or simulations. While it may cost a school district additional time and money to implement these hiring strategies, in the long run they will likely make better hiring decisions and select candidates based upon their knowledge and understanding of school leadership. In addition, these comprehensive measures would also add to a school district's knowledge of the potential "fit" that a candidate might have within their school and community culture, vision, and values.

2. Shifting demographics indicate that Iowa will be faced with an administrative shortage of interested and/or qualified people within the next several years. As a result, larger school districts may begin the practice of aggressively recruiting and “growing their own” internal elementary principal candidates. This practice could allow school districts to hire quality internal candidates that they already know possess the personal dispositions they believe are critical for success. In addition, these internal candidates would also have a familiarity with the current instructional practices already in place within the district. On the other hand, shifting from a teacher's role to an administrator's role may cause initial difficulty for both the internal candidate as well as their colleagues. Traditionally, when previous teaching colleagues are asked to accept a former teaching colleague as their new building leader, the internal candidate is either welcomed or more harshly judged by their peers. In order for this to be a successful transition for an internal candidate, it is important that school districts utilize an inclusive hiring process that involves members of the existing staff so they have adequate input into the hiring decision. It is also important to establish a positive support network for the internal

candidate that might include the use of a mentor, peer coach, and/or professional development opportunities.

3. While most school districts in this study explicitly stated the need for experienced elementary principals to fill their vacant positions, a shortage of candidates with experience may cause “prior administrative experience” to lose some of its strength in the criteria that school districts develop for their elementary principal positions. In the near future, it may not be feasible to actually meet this previously held key component of the established criteria.

As a result of the predicted rapid turn over, it may be that larger districts will more aggressively recruit from smaller districts to obtain an experienced administrator. If larger school districts increase the recruitment of experienced administrators from smaller schools, it is likely it will put even greater pressure on the smaller districts to be able to retain their experienced school leaders. Over time, this siphoning by the larger districts may have an acute impact on the ability to equitably administer and manage elementary schools across the state. These shifting positions may imply, for smaller schools, that they will need to examine and implement strategies to retain



their elementary principals by offering incentives to stay which may include more attractive salaries, benefit packages, and housing allowances.

4. This study was conducted with school personnel administrators from large school districts in Iowa. What appeared to be evident from talking with these individuals was the commitment that their districts have made to the importance of the human resource position or function in their district.

Clearly, those who hold the human resource position exert considerable influence on how well the hiring process operates and ultimately the quality of who is hired. If districts currently have someone hired in the human resource director position - close attention should be paid to whom the district hires to fill this position in the future. Smaller school districts that do not have an administrator with the sole responsibility of school personnel issues should place emphasis on one or more administrators developing particular expertise and knowledge in school personnel issues. The Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators is one organization in the state that can provide substantive professional expertise and networking opportunities to smaller districts. In addition, districts should seek other statewide and national level

professional development and training opportunities for administrators in areas regarding the recruiting and hiring of school administrators in the state of Iowa.

5. All school districts and potential elementary principal candidates need to take professional networking seriously. The educational network in Iowa is a tight-knit group, and school district personnel tend to rely on relationships with others to help identify potential candidates to fill vacant positions. Networking is a tool that is used not only by school personnel administrators, but also by superintendents, principals, and teachers. When hiring elementary school principals, school districts often look beyond the written application materials and face to face interview performance of a candidate. Candidates are hired based upon both what they know as well as what others know about them. Therefore, candidates need to understand the importance of professional contacts and networking.
6. As noted in the literature and findings of this study, there were a number of strategies that districts utilized to provide a more comprehensive assessment of candidates. If not already doing so, higher education institutions that offer

principal preparation programs will need to review whether they are adequately preparing program graduates for Iowa's current hiring situation. If not already doing so, programs may need to consider offering a seminar or course for students to prepare them for an actual elementary principal hiring process. Students should receive instruction and constructive feedback in areas such as writing letters of application, designing a resume, conducting mock interviews, and evaluating teaching lessons. Panel presentations and mentoring opportunities with current human resource directors would also be of help, especially to those candidates who have little or no administrative experience. Clearly, all candidates need to understand the importance of today's comprehensive hiring procedures. In addition, higher education institutions and state wide administrator organizations need to find practical ways of preparing aspiring, as well as experienced, administrators in this process.

## Recommendations for Future Research

1. This study was conducted with a group of school personnel administrators representing school districts in Iowa with K-12 student enrollments that are larger than most school districts throughout the state of Iowa. Research studies of what mid-sized and smaller school districts consider important when hiring elementary school principals would contribute to a statewide understanding of key characteristics all Iowa school districts generally seek when hiring elementary school principals.
2. Literature and data from this study focused on the hiring of elementary level principals in Iowa. A research study of what people look for when they hire middle school and/or secondary school principals would also be of value and could serve to broaden a statewide understanding of the similarities and differences that exist among the different levels of school leadership.
3. The data from this study suggested a reluctance of Iowa school personnel administrators to use multiple forms of assessment when screening potential

elementary principal candidates. Further inquiry about what people see as advantages and disadvantages of these instruments and why some Iowa districts do or do not use them would be of value to anyone interested in improving current processes of hiring elementary school principals.

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## Appendix A

## SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

**What Matters in Selecting Elementary School Principals?**

Survey of Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators

Spring, 2000

Hiring Considerations

Please indicate what you believe is important when selecting an elementary principal.  
**Place the number of your response in the blank to the left of each item.**

1=	2= Below Average	3= Average	4= Above Average	5= Very
Not important	Importance	Importance	Importance	Important

- \_\_\_ 1. Is a risk taker when considering school improvement
- \_\_\_ 2. Has knowledge of instructional strategies – “understands effective practice”
- \_\_\_ 3. Treats all individuals with dignity, respect, and sincerity
- \_\_\_ 4. Is highly visible and actively involved in the school and community
- \_\_\_ 5. Values, goals, and personality are a “fit” with the administrative team
- \_\_\_ 6. Possesses strong school management skills – “can take care of details”
- \_\_\_ 7. Involves stakeholders in school-decision making processes – “is a team-player”
- \_\_\_ 8. Models and encourages life-long learning and professional development
- \_\_\_ 9. Has a good sense of humor
- \_\_\_ 10. Energetic – “goes the extra mile”
- \_\_\_ 11. Prior professional experience indicates strong student centered philosophy
- \_\_\_ 12. Has teaching experience/endorsements in specialty areas (e.g. early childhood, special education, reading, technology)
- \_\_\_ 13. Demonstrates knowledge of effective educational leadership theory and practice
- \_\_\_ 14. Holds a valid Iowa administrative license – “is ready to go”
- \_\_\_ 15. Has experience as a school administrator (e.g. elementary principal, curriculum director, special education administrator)

**Continued on back>>>>>>>>>>**

## Hiring Process

Please indicate the extent to which the following items are currently used in hiring elementary principals. **Place the number of your response in the blank to the left of each item.**

1= Almost never      2= Infrequently      3= Frequently      4= Almost Always      5 = Unsure

- \_\_\_ 16. Developing specific criteria for the position
  - \_\_\_ 17. Utilizing an application screening committee
  - \_\_\_ 18. Using candidate screening service (e.g. consultant firm, principal perceiver)
  - \_\_\_ 19. Recruiting within the system
  - \_\_\_ 20. Recruiting statewide
  - \_\_\_ 21. Recruiting nationally
  - \_\_\_ 22. Informal networking with others about candidates
  - \_\_\_ 23. Having the candidates complete specific written questions with the application
  - \_\_\_ 24. Contacting candidates' references prior to the interview process
  - \_\_\_ 25. Interviewing performance of the candidate
  - \_\_\_ 26. Having the candidates meet with teachers, parents, students, and community members
  - \_\_\_ 27. Visiting the community of final candidates
28. When using an elementary principal interview team, which of the following people, if any, generally serve on the interview team? **Please check all that apply.**
- |                                   |                              |                       |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| ___ Teachers                      | ___ Principal                | ___ Parents           |
| ___ Superintendent                | ___ Students                 | ___ Community members |
| ___ Central office personnel      | ___ Classified staff members |                       |
| ___ Others (please specify) _____ |                              |                       |

29. Briefly describe prominent changes (if any) that you have seen occurring in the recruitment and hiring of elementary principals throughout your career.

Thank you for completing this survey! Please return in the enclosed envelope or fax to  
(515) 965-9663

## Appendix B

## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

April, 2000

Dear Colleague:

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Drake University and have developed the enclosed survey of which I am asking you to respond. The purpose of my dissertation study is to contribute a better understanding of what school personnel administrators consider important when hiring an elementary school principal.

You have been identified as a member of the Iowa Association of School Personnel Administrators. Your response to this survey is crucial because I am trying to determine how and why the members of your group hire the elementary principals that you do.

Many school districts across the state of Iowa will soon be faced with the task of hiring one or more elementary school principals to serve as instructional leaders. It has been found that the principal's leadership is one of the key factors in ensuring school effectiveness and productivity, and planning for the recruitment and selection of these positions will be crucial.

While I will be reporting a summary of all responses, your individual response will be kept confidential. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time with no repercussions.

The results of this study will be invaluable as I examine the characteristics that influence the selection of elementary principal candidates and the implicit and explicit influences that are particularly persuasive in deciding to hire one candidate over another. I will also examine how the hiring process typically proceeds and how it is different from the past.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. I would be happy to share my findings with you after the research is completed. My e-mail address is and my phone number is (515) 964-5606.

Please complete the enclosed questionnaire, and return it to me in the enclosed envelope no later than April 15, 2000. Thank you very much for your help.

Respectfully,

Thomas M. Muhlenbruck

Anne Feldman  
IASPA Co-President

Dr. Greg Reed  
IASPA Co-President

## Appendix C

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Interview Protocol

Project: Why do schools choose the elementary principals that they do?

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

## Questions:

1. How long have you been a school administrator? How long have you been in your current position? How many elementary principals have you hired in your career?
2. If so....think back on the elementary principals that you have hired-----
  - What does the elementary principal hiring process look like in your district?
  - How did you decide what components to include in the process?
  - What factors pull a candidate out of the pile of applications?
  - What factors keep a candidate from getting out of the pile?
  - Who is responsible for the screening of applications in your district?
3. What is your reaction to the information on the survey that others identified as key characteristics when they hire an elementary principal? Any surprises? What do you think this data means? As you look at your individual survey response, what were you thinking about when you marked your survey? Can you share an experience that you have had that relates to what the survey respondents said?

4. Prior experience as an administrator/related teaching experiences/and having licensure completion did not score as high as a number of other items. Have you hired principals that would fall in this category? Why would others mark this so low?
5. What characteristics in a candidate do you consider as “negative?” Is this a personal bias for you or do you think that other HR directors would agree with you?
6. The interview performance of the candidate scored very high on the survey instrument. Why do you think others feel this is so important? How important is it to you?
7. When it becomes time to make the decision to hire one candidate over others, what is **the** factor that really turns the decision for you? What is the spark that you are looking for?
8. What do you consider as the most important qualification for an elementary principal beyond current course and licensing requirements?
9. What would you rather choose; a candidate that is a little bit better qualified for the position or one that would ‘fit’ better with the rest of the school, community, and administrative team? Why?
10. Look at the items on the survey regarding the hiring process. What are some things that catch your eye? What do people mean when they say they recruit statewide/and or within the system? Is this recruiting more formal? Informal? What does the idea of “who you know” mean in this instance?

11. What have you seen evolve in the hiring process during the course of your career?

- What component of the hiring process do you see as the most critical?
- Was there ever a time that you hired someone and then wished you could have changed the decision? If so, what part of the hiring process broke down?
- What is the role of your school board in the hiring process?
- What is the specific role of the superintendent?
- Is there any specific training that you provide for your interview team members?
- What happens if everyone on the interview team does not agree on the same choice?

12. What knowledge do you have of administrator assessment centers, administrator perceiver instruments, and the use of administrative internships? Have you ever utilized these instruments in your recruitment and hiring process? What do you think the future is of these kinds of assessments? They scored very low on the survey. Why do you think so?

13. What recommendations do you have for other school personnel administrators as they hire elementary principals?

14. What should I have asked you but didn't?

## Appendix D

### INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

**“Through the eyes of selected school personnel administrators in Iowa: What does the elementary principal hiring process look like?”**

The purpose of this study is to contribute a better understanding of what school personnel administrators consider important when hiring an elementary school principal. The procedure will be a descriptive qualitative design.

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without any repercussion to the subject.

Data will be collected in two ways. The first data collection procedure will be a twenty-nine item survey. The second data collection procedure will be in-depth interviews with selected survey respondents. Interviews will be conducted at a site that is convenient for the interviewee and will last approximately 45 minutes.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. Feel free to contact me at (515) 964-5606, or you can contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Annette Liggett, at (515) 271-3719. I would be happy to share my findings with after the research is completed. However, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and your identity as a participant will be known only to the researcher. There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study.

The expected benefit associated with your participation is the information that you will contribute to a better understanding of 1: what matters in the selection of elementary principal candidates for interviews. 2: what factors are particularly persuasive in deciding to hire one candidate over another, and 3: how the hiring process typically proceeds and how it is different from the past. The data and conclusions will provide current school administrators with information to reformulate practices that may increase the probability of attracting and hiring higher quality candidates for elementary principal openings. The data and conclusions will also be of interest to universities with principal/school administrator preparation programs, professional associations, and aspiring elementary school principals.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you.

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Signature of Participant

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Witness

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Date

Thomas M. Muhlenbruck, Principal Investigator 483 82 4103